AWAKE AND REHEARSE

By LOUIS BROMFIELD

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By the same author

THE GREEN BAY TREE

POSSESSION

EARLY AUTUMN

A GOOD WOMAN

THE STRANGE CASE OF
MISS ANNIE SPRAGG

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

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BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

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To ALICE DAMROSCH PENNINGTON *I am indebted for the title of this book.*

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· I ·

THE CAT THAT LIVED AT THE RITZ

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

The CAT THAT LIVED *at the* RITZ

WHEN I knew her she was an old, old woman with a face that was lined, white and transparent. There seemed to be a kind of illumination behind the thin high cheek-bones, but it must have been a purely material illumination, for there was never anything spiritual about Miss Wannop. She was dry as an old bone.

All her life she took the most exquisite care of her skin. Her toilette frequently took as long as two hours, and even as a very old woman she treated herself as if she had been a great beauty whose duty it was to guard the treasure God had

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given into her care. Yet she was not a beauty and never could have been, even in her youth. Her nose was too thin, her temples too pinched and her mouth too small and narrow. She did have the look of what one expects a lady to be and she took pride in that look of breeding and in the end it helped her more than all her money to deceive people and so to gain those things which she valued to the exclusion of friendship, of blood relationship, even of human warmth.

All these things I learned after her death, from the woman who for eleven years was her maid and who is now the wife of my *maître d'hôtel.* With this woman Miss Wannop has remained a kind of obsession. She would rather discuss Miss Wannop than talk of any other subject on heaven or earth.

The odd thing was how Miss Wannop came by that queer, pinched, ladylike look, for one grandfather had been a butcher in Brooklyn and the other a ship's chandler on the wharves of West Street. It was the butcher who, having embarked late in life upon a wholesale trade in meat, laid the foundations of the great fortune which in the end was put to such strange uses by Miss Wannop.

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I met her through a creature called the Marquis de Vestiglione. He is a shabby, threadbare little man, whose only claim to celebrity lay in the fact that he had once been the husband of a famous beauty of the Seventies in Paris. The lady married him because she needed a *cocu* who would provide a certain screen of respectability in return for the notice that came to him as the consort of so notorious a character. That fact rather explains the gentleman. He was the kind of weak man who enjoys being seen in the company of well-advertised strumpets. He lived upon money given his wife by her lovers, and when she died he dropped out of the world, completely forgotten, a penniless and cuckold nonentity.

He had many rather shady ways of finding money to feed and lodge himself, and one of them was to go about the country picking up bits of old furniture which later he sold to shops or, through the medium of one or two ancient acquaintances of his late wife, to rich Americans. My father collected *porcelaine de Saxe* and so he came to know the Marquis de Vestiglione. It was after my father's death that I received a note from him written in a mincing and servile style

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with all the flourish of handwriting that was genteel and elegant in the Seventies. He wrote that a friend of his, a certain Miss Savina Wannop (an American lady who had lived so long in Paris that she was *really* French) had an interest in *porcelaine de Saxe* and had heard of my father's collection. She was very rich, he added, and in case I cared to dispose of the collection, I would be able to sell it to her at an excellent price.

"I believe," he continued, "that I am the person to aid you, as I have had some experience as a connoisseur of these things [he carefully avoided using the obvious term "dealer"] and would know the true value of your collection. The commission could, of course, be arranged later.

"Miss Wannop," he wrote, "knowing your position in the world, is eager that this should not be simply a commercial affair. Having lived so long among us, she understands the delicacies of such a transaction between people of our class. Therefore, if you are interested, she asks if you would care to join us at the Ritz for tea on Thursday, so that she may be presented. She lives at the Ritz. I will be waiting for you in the hall on the Place Vendôme side at five."

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The affectation of the note amused me as well as certain of its observations, especially the one concerning the delicacy of transactions between people of our class, because in affairs of business there is no class in France. When it comes to buying or selling something, duchesses and concierges in France are exactly the same.

And it struck me as odd that I had never encountered a lady who had lived so long in Paris and who was so rich and had so great a respect for the amenities of the best society. My mother was American and in my youth we had many Americans in the house. The name of Miss Wannop did, however, have a faintly familiar ring, and its sense of familiarity grew more tormenting as the day of the tea approached. It would not leave me in peace and I found myself repeating in the night, "Miss Wannop, Miss Savina Wannop, Miss Wannop . . . " And then suddenly in the middle of the night I knew why I knew the name but not the lady. It was one of those names which appeared regularly in social columns of the Paris *Herald*.

While my mother was alive the columns had

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been a source of amusement to us. Day after day there had always appeared the same list of names. Their bearers appeared to live always in a round of mad gaiety. To judge from the columns of the *Herald*, these same people went from one entertainment to another, sometimes to as many as four teas or receptions or charity bazaars in a single day. We knew all the names, yet we knew none of the people. It was a strange world made up of my mother's country people and French people like the Marquis de Vestiglione. It was a world that seemed to exist in a vacuum, and each individual in it appeared to have what you would call a press agent. They were always present at paid entertainments.

One of the names had been that of Miss Savina Wannop. We remembered it because it was such an odd name. I could not recollect having seen it lately, but since my mother died I had given up reading the column. The next morning I picked up the *Herald*, and there miraculously I found it at once.

Among those present at the unusually brilliant entertainment and ball given last night at the Ritz

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for the Benefit of the Russian Orphans in the Crimea were the Marquis de Vestiglione and Miss Savina Wannop.

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The old man, clad in a shabby cutaway and soiled yellow gloves, met me just inside the revolving-doors. He was all bows, smiles and servility, for he was a toady who existed only in relation to people whom he considered important. Alone in his own room I cannot think of him as existing at all. In this case I fancy he was impressed by the name and family of my French father and the wealth of my American mother. And he was nervous about the bargain over the *porcelaine*.

He rubbed together dry and wrinkled old hands slightly dirty about the nails, and commented upon the January cold. "Miss Wannop is waiting for us," he added. "I am sure you will find her a charming person."

It was midwinter and most of the tables were filled. They were all there—American millionaires, demi-mondaines, decayed grand dukes and cousins of dethroned royalty, German buyers speaking bad English in the hope that they would be mistaken

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for Americans, English titles, Argentine cattle kings, Italian "princes" who were blackmailers, American college girls seeing life, actresses, Spanish dukes, decayed and once famous beauties. Following my shabby Marquis through the mob, I picked out an old lady sitting alone by a pillar who I was certain must be Miss Wannop. She was large and heavy, with a red wig, huge diamond earrings, and a large, badly painted mouth.

"This," I told myself, "must be Miss Wannop. This is what American women of her generation turn into when they have, as my friend says, lived among us for so long."

I made ready to bow and seat myself, but we passed the diamonds and the red wig without a sign of recognition. A second later Vestiglione halted abruptly before an old lady whom I should never have noticed. Bowing, he said, "This is Mees Wannop. May I present the Prince de S——."

He said it in English, but she replied at once in the most exquisite and flawless French. "There is no need to speak English. I know French well. I am almost French myself. I have lived among you so long."

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She wasn't at all the Miss Wannop I had expected. She wasn't at all like most American women of my mother's generation who, married to Frenchmen and Italians, have withered away and turned bitter, or dyed their hair and taken lovers, or formed a despairing interest in art or music or charity. And she wasn't, of course, like the young American women of our day, glittering, handsome and self-assured. She was a little old lady of the greatest gentility, not in the rakish, enlightened sense of the eighteenth century, but . . . well . . . rather Louis Philippe, dowdy and a little *manqué*. That ever-recurrent expression, "I have lived among you so long," was the key. Here, I thought, was an American who had accomplished what so many Americans of Miss Wannop's day had attempted without success. She had fled an America which she found hard and vulgar for a France that she saw through a sentimental haze, overlooking all its footless aristocracy and the heavy coarseness of its bourgeois Third Republic. And she had actually transformed herself into a Frenchwoman. All her friends, I divined, must be French. Vestiglione was simply a chance acquaintance picked up

in a business arrangement. In appearance she seemed exactly like my French grandmother.

She was small and thin and dressed in purple and black, and wore on her fingers amethysts and diamonds in heavy old-fashioned gold settings. As I approached she had let fall the piece of *petit point* on which she had been working with the air of a duchess who must recover her old chairs with her own hands because it was the tradition in her family.

I said to her, "Of course, I speak English well enough. My mother was an American."

Her gentle smile said, "Need you tell that to one who has lived among you so long?" And her lean, small, aristocratic voice said, "Yes, I know all about that. I once served on the same charity board as your grandmother. The French one, I mean, of course. The old Princesse. I have not lived in America for forty years."

Again it occurred to me that it was strange I had never heard of her save in the newspapers and then only in a world which neither my mother nor myself could believe really existed.

"I suppose you would find it greatly changed if you went back now."

"Oh, I shall never go now. I've been away too long. Why, I've even lost all trace of my own relations, all except a cousin who turns up now and then. She married a Frenchman . . . " Her voice fell almost to a whisper, as if she were about to mention a disgrace. "It was of course only a Bonapartist title . . . the Prince de Bézancourt."

I murmured that I had the honor of knowing the Princesse, her cousin. A delightful and amusing woman.

"But it is not the same," she said in a voice which with my eyes shut I could have sworn was my grandmother's. But my grandmother was, of course, a Frenchwoman, whose father had died on a scaffold in the eighteenth century, and she was much nearer to Napoleon. You could understand why my grandmother childishly looked upon him as an upstart. "My cousin Emma," she continued, "never adapted herself to the ways of her new country. She made no effort." And the thin small mouth closed in an unpleasant line of disapproval.

"But she was happy," I said. "It was one of the few happy marriages of that sort. Her husband adored her, to the very end. It is a kind of

legend that he was one faithful French husband in history. She kept him amused and all his friends too."

I kept seeing her, Cousin Emma, the Princesse de Bézancourt, as different as day and night from this quiet, exquisite old lady. Even as an old woman Emma de Bézancourt in a red wig had the fire and the wit to draw young men about her.

But the cold, pleasant, refined voice was saying, "But it is not the same. Bézancourt himself was the grandson of a blacksmith. And my Cousin Emma owed a duty to her new country."

They were the very words I had heard my grandmother use about Emma de Bézancourt—how long ago? Thirty years perhaps. Only because Emma de Bézancourt had been alive and human and colorful.

"But she made her husband and her children very happy."

She did not appear to think this argument worth an answer, and Vestiglione, who had been waiting a chance to talk of the days when France was still a country fit for a gentleman to live in, launched himself upon a long-winded account of a visit made to the Château de Bézancourt in the

days when he had been the cuckold husband of the Beauty. Miss Wannop appeared not to listen, as if such a world could hold no interest to one who had the Royalist cause at heart. Once, in the middle of the account, he winked at me and murmured, "Miss Wannop doesn't care for that set." It was an insolent and vulgar wink. I was aware that he wasn't toadying now to Miss Wannop, but to me. The old lady, I think, was a little childish and failed to notice.

When he had finished, Miss Wannop picked up the thread of conversation as if the unfortunate Bonapartist interlude had never occurred. Finally we came round to the delicate business of the *porcelaine de Saxe*. She had, she said, long known of my father's famous collection. She was a collector herself. She had had a house in the Rue de l'Universite, but she had given it up during the war because it was so difficult to keep servants. Since then she had lived at the Ritz and all her things had been kept in storage. She failed to speak of money, or of price, or to suggest that I would take less than the asking price. It was the first time she seemed different from my grandmother. My grandmother would have haggled over every sou.

The Marquis, devouring cakes and sandwiches with the air of a man who had not lunched, talked a great deal of the beauty and value of the collection, all of course with his commission in view. I asked her to lunch on the following Monday to inspect the collection and she accepted at once, almost with an air of eagerness.

And at the same moment I saw the immense woman with the red wig and the diamond earrings moving toward us.

"Ah," said Miss Wannop, smiling faintly. "It is Olivia. You must know her already, Monsieur de S——. She is a charming woman, don't you think? And one of the most ardent of Blacks."

I had to admit that I did not know the Duchess, but in the next moment I was presented. At the mention of my name the evil old face of the Duchess lighted up as if someone had turned on a light behind the badly painted mask. "Ah, of course," she said, seating herself heavily on one of the gilt chairs. "I knew your grandmother in Italy . . . the old Princesse. We were on the same committee to aid the orphans of people who died there of the plague."

The notorious charitable activities of my devout

grandmother had, I thought suddenly, brought her some strange acquaintances. The most noticeable fact about the Duchess was, I think, her need of a thorough bath. The rouge and powder on her massive face had been put on, layer after layer, until it had caked. The great shelf of a bosom bore evidence that she was an untidy eater.

Then I noticed that she had not spoken to Vestiglione and that he had turned his chair a little away from her. Something about the strange trio made me suddenly uneasy. It was a feeling difficult to put into words, but I felt that I must escape the depression that was settling over me and that I could only escape it by escaping these people. I rose and kissed the hands of both ladies, the white, immaculate, beautifully kept hand of Miss Wannop, covered with diamonds and amethysts in old-fashioned gold settings, and the fat greasy one of the Duchess with greedy eyes.

Vestiglione rose quickly too, but he only kissed the hand of Miss Wannop. And then an odd thing happened. I saw a look of horror come into the china-blue eyes of Miss Wannop. I heard her scream, "That horrid beast!" and I saw her faint dead away. At the sound of her scream, others

turned from the tables all about us and out from under the table itself ran a great white cat. It scurried through the crowd and disappeared into the corridor that led toward the Rue Cambon.

In a wild confusion we got her upstairs amid cries from the Duchess of "Ma chère Savine! C'est inouï! C'est incroyable! A laisser vivre cette sale bête."

Miss Wannop had a bedroom and a salon overlooking the garden and both were filled with *porcelaine de Saxe* arranged coldly in horrible cabinets and vitrines in the style of Louis Philippe. What she could possibly want with more of the stuff, I did not know. Among it moved her maid, a big, florid woman called Amélie. It was she who succeeded in restoring Miss Wannop to consciousness. I left the old lady to the tender care of the Duchess, but Vestiglione remained glued to my side. I soon discovered the reason. He wanted a lift in my motor to the door of the shabby hotel where he lived. I suspect, too, that it gave him pleasure and a sense of self-respect to have the world see him walking through the corridors of the Ritz by the

side of a man who was rich, respectable and possessed of a position.

In the motor he kept on revealing his horrid little character. It began when I asked who on earth was the Duchess de Venterollo. The name haunted me in the same fashion as Miss Wannop's had done.

"She is," he said, "a nobody, one of those countless cheap Italian titles. She's a vulgar old woman who lives off Miss Wannop."

"But," I said, "she seems to be covered with diamonds."

"They are all paste. She even got those out of Miss Wannop." He sighed. "She is too good-hearted, too trusting and too generous."

It occurred to me that if it had been the Duchess to whom I had given a lift, she would have been saying the same things of little Vestiglione. These two ruins, these harpies, were living off the naive old lady. And yet she wasn't naive, because she was much too hard. She must have been a little stupid. She could have done better than these two.

Hoping to draw him into deeper water, I said, "Miss Wannop does not seem the sort to be imposed upon."

He slipped away by repeating, "She is much too

kind, much too kind." This, I knew, was nonsense. Whatever virtues Miss Wannop may have had, kindness was not among them. Talking to her was like talking to a marble pillar. There was no warmth or resiliency. She was flat, cold, metallic.

I mentioned the incident of the cat.

"She has a horror of cats," he said. "She can feel it when one is in the room with her. That white cat has lived at the Ritz for years . . . on the Rue Cambon side, in the grill."

I told him that I knew the cat well and was even fond of it. "But it must annoy her continually," I observed.

"Oh, she never goes to the Rue Cambon side. It's partly on account of the cat, but more, I think, on account of the people one sees there. You see, they offend her."

"It is much more lively and amusing than that den of decayed wrecks where we had tea today."

He did not wince. "Yes, but you see, she belongs to another day and another world. And then the bar is always filled with Americans, and she has lived among us so long . . . "

I could not endure the remark again. "She

ought to know," I said, "that young France is trying to be as American as possible."

"But it's not the same thing. Your mother didn't belong to the noisy vulgar mob. She was like . . . like Miss Wannop."

The remark made me angry and gave me my first clue to my real feeling about the old lady. She suddenly seemed to me, in spite of all her airs and refinements, the most vulgar woman I had ever known.

"My mother was certainly not like Miss Wannop."

"Perhaps not . . . " he said smoothly.

"But the cat. If she feels like that about cats, I can't see why she stays on at the Ritz."

"She threatens to leave, but they know she never will."

"But why . . . she's rich and free."

"She couldn't bear living alone. At the Ritz she sees her friends." After a moment he said, "It's an odd thing about the cat. It never crosses over to the Place Vendôme side unless she is there. It seems to be fascinated by her."

As the chauffeur opened the door for the battered Marquis to step down, the old man said,

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"Don't be afraid to ask a good price for the *porcelaine*. Money is nothing to her when she's impressed, and you have impressed her."

With this cryptic remark he vanished through the garish yellow door of his hotel.

All the way home the name Venterollo haunted me, and then all at once I knew. It was one of the names in the mysterious world of the Paris *Herald*. At home I took up the paper again. Yes, she too had been at the dinner for the Crimean orphans along with Miss Wannop and Vestiglione.

3

On Monday, the day I was to entertain Vestiglione and Miss Wannop, at lunch, I opened the *Herald* to read, "*Among those who entertained at the unusually brilliant Sunday night at the Ritz was Miss Savina Wannop, who had as her guests the Duchess de Venterollo, the Marquis de Vestiglione and the Prince Puriatine.*"

So there was another "friend" rescued from among the hordes of stray Russians. I imagined Miss Wannop surrounded by three hungry ruins instead of two.

To my astonishment Miss Wannop appeared for lunch accompanied by a maid, the same big Auvergnat known as Amélie. She was a capable servant, no doubt, despite her independent, mocking black eyes. It seemed to me a bit swanky that Miss Wannop should be accompanied thus as if she were a kind of royalty. Amélie was sent to the servants' hall to lunch.

We ate in the green dining-room where Miss Wannop admired the *boiserie*, the Coromandel screen, the crystals—all the stuff collected by my father with which I had no desire to part. I saw that Vestiglione's little green eyes were appraising the value of each piece and thinking how much he might get in commissions on them from some rich American who did not haggle over prices.

I said, "I mean to part with nothing but the *porcelaine*. My mother left me plenty of money. I am not poor."

Miss Wannop passed over the vulgar reference to American money, as if she were ashamed of her own wealth derived from sources of which I was at that time ignorant. My dislike for her was growing. It was not the cold contempt I felt for Vestiglione but something harsher than that which

arose from a sight of the patrician marble mask, the cold expressionless blue eyes and the delicate blue-veined hands.

With a rather shameful impulse toward malice, I expressed my sympathy over the affair of the cat.

At once she grew agitated. "Let's not speak of it," she said. "The thought makes me ill."

And then I discovered an obscure desire, rather strange in me who is amiable by nature, to torment her, a helpless old lady, old enough to be my grandmother.

She spoke of the Rue Cambon side of the Ritz. "Of course it's all changed now. I can remember when one saw only ladies and gentlemen. It's almost as bad everywhere." For a moment she put down her fork. (She ate greedily, exposing fine, sharp little white teeth.) "You know, Monsieur de S——, I have never cared for my own people; even as a girl I only felt at home with the *real* French."

This I thought was a very old-fashioned remark. It was like something out of Henry James; and then it occurred to me that in her youth she must have been very like the wandering Americans who

strayed through his pages. I knew what she meant by the *real* French—the sort that were Royalist and black Roman Catholic, who consider baths and central heating the height of vulgarity, and whose conversation when it was not concerned with the fantastic idea of placing some mental incompetent upon an imaginary throne, was of turnips or their rheumatism.

"I find that my own people—that is, the ones who were my people once—have no sensibilities."

(This, I thought, was Henry James with a vengeance.)

After lunch we looked at the *porcelaine*. She admired the pieces with a curious banal enthusiasm though it seemed to me that she knew nothing whatever about them—the dates, the lustre, the marks—nothing that a person with so large a collection and so enthusiastically expressed an interest should have known. And one by one before we reached them she asked Vestiglione to remove any group which might contain a cat. As the subject was extremely rare, there were only two.

"Keep those for yourself," she said. "I will buy the rest. I have no room for them at the Ritz, but

I'll have a man come and pack them for storage with my other things."

"But we haven't discussed price!" I protested.

"I'll trust you. I dislike discussing money. I'm sure I can trust a de S——."

What could I do but shrug my shoulders? It all seemed a bit silly.

Amélie was summoned from the servants' hall and arrived looking doubly robust and high colored. On leaving, Miss Wannop said, "To bind the bargain you must dine with me on Sunday night."

My first impulse was to refuse, and then I felt a desire to know more of her, to get to the end of the story if there was any end. She fascinated me as cats do. She went downstairs and disappeared into her respectable, high-pitched, old-fashioned motor.

When she had gone Vestiglione proceeded to make it known to me that we might ask her what we liked for the *porcelaine*. . . . I told him that I would have in an expert to value the pieces and set a figure, and I saw his greedy eyes darken with disappointment.

"But why," I asked, "is she indifferent about the price? No one is as rich as that."

"No," he replied, "but she is getting old and she—" he hesitated, "and she is trying to get rid of her money. She has no one to leave it to. She is alone in the world."

"But why should she want to give it to me—a stranger? For that's what it amounts to."

Again he hesitated. "Well, she is royalist, you see. She wants to help those of the old régime."

This made me want to laugh, but I merely said, "But I'm rich already. It can't help me. And I am not idiot enough to be a sincere royalist."

"It's not altogether that, perhaps." He looked at me slyly. "Perhaps you wouldn't understand . . . but she'd like to have you dine with her at the Ritz."

4

On Sunday night the other guests were the Duchess, Vestiglione and a Russian Prince who drank far too much and seemed not quite bright. He was called Prince Puriatine. It was a nightmare of boredom, with the Russian drinking himself into utter stupidity and the Duchess and

Vestiglione hating each other and competing for the favors of Miss Wannop. The lady herself seemed not to notice the squalid air of the party, but sat looking about her at the other tables. She peered through lorgnettes with an expression which was unmistakably that of satisfaction. The other tables were scarcely better than our own. There were a great many ruins like Miss Wannop's friends, interspersed among tremendously fat women in pince-nez and yards of passementerie, who wore rather the same expression of satisfaction as bloomed upon the delicate cheek of Miss Wannop. They were certain that at last they were moving in the great world of Europe. There were titles, too, on every side. I am certain of it. There were all the titles my mother had laughed at so many times, for here at last was the heart of that lost world which we had never believed existed.

In the morning I read in the *Herald*, "Among those who entertained as the unusually brilliant dinner at the Ritz was Miss Savina Wannop, who had as her guests the Prince de S——, the Duchesse de Venterollo, the Marquis de Vestiglione and the Prince Puriatine. . . . "

I felt somehow that I had been publicly soiled.

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Miss Wannop kindly invited me on two other occasions to an "unusually brilliant dinner" at the Ritz, but I did not accept. Nevertheless I suffered, for my name appeared as usual in the columns of the *Herald* as one of Miss Wannop's guests. It then occurred to me that some mysterious agency supplied the *Herald* columns with its list of guests and sometimes supplied it too well in advance.

The *porcelaine* was packed and sent to storage. I discovered that Vestiglione had tried to sell the collection to her at a price far above that named by the expert, and after a row I rid myself of him forever. And with the business completed, I drew a veil over my "friendship" with Miss Wannop, unaware that I was doing what hundreds of others had done before me. I did not like her, and she was a bore. And she still seemed to me, for no reason which I could name, the most vulgar person I had ever known.

But the affair was not over. One day three months later Henri, my maître d'hôtel, came to me

to announce that he planned to be married. Would I have any objections?

"No," I said, none whatever so long as it did not interfere with his work. I congratulated him. Who was the lady?

Henri shifted uneasily for a moment. "Her name is Amélie. Perhaps you remember her, sir? The maid who came to lunch with the old lady from the Ritz."

"Of course. But she seems quite a handful. I suppose she'll be staying on with Miss Wannop?"

Again Henri shifted his feet. "Why, no, sir. That was just it. I wondered if you couldn't find her a place here in the house?"

I thought for a moment. "I suppose I could find her a place. But you see, Henri, I don't want to feel that I'm stealing Miss Wannop's maid from her."

"You wouldn't be, sir. Amélie plans to leave, anyway."

"But she's been with Miss Wannop a long time."

"Seven years. And she still gives satisfaction, sir. It's Amélie who is breaking off. She says she's spent as much of her life as she means to with

a . . . a . . . monster was the word Amélie used, sir."

"Miss Wannop a monster! Why, she's a very nice old lady."

"Sometimes, sir, people seem different to their servants . . . more real, I mean. Amélie says she'd go mad if she stayed any longer with Miss Wannop."

"Why has she stayed so long?"

"Well, you see, sir, it's a good place, as money goes. Amélie gets three times the wages of a lady's maid, just to stay with Miss Wannop. It seems she can't get a servant to stay otherwise. She must be a pretty terrible old lady for Amélie to give up all that money." A shadow of humor colored his voice. "Amélie's an Auvergnat, too, and you know how they feel about money."

"And what does Miss Wannop do that makes Amélie want to leave her?"

"I can't quite make out, sir. It's just that she is . . . well, Amélie says she's not a human being."

The answer did not make sense, but there seemed to be nothing to be gained by questioning.

"I'll think it over. Perhaps I can make a place for Amélie."

Two days later, before I had given Henri an answer, Amélie herself called me by telephone. She was, she explained in a shaken voice, sorry to trouble me, but Miss Wannop had died suddenly during the night and she did not know what to do. She had called Miss Wannop's friends, but to no good.

"What friends?" I asked.

The voice of the big Auvergnat came back to me, a voice rich with scorn. "Madame la Duchesse, Monsieur le Marquis, Monsieur le Prince." Neither the Duchess nor Vestiglione would come, and the Prince Puriatine was too drunk to make sense. Surely, I argued, there must be other friends who knew Miss Wannop better than I did.

"No," said Amélie. "She had no other friends."

So I agreed to come at once.

6

Amélie, excited and tearful, was standing in the middle of the salon filled with *porcelaine de Saxe*. She was dressed to go out and had her bags by her side.

"Surely," I said, "you don't mean to leave the moment Miss Wannop dies."

There was no arguing with her. Amélie meant to go, without delay. "It was like her to die on the day I was to be married," she said bitterly. "I'll be late, as it is."

I mentioned loyalty. "Loyalty!" screamed Amélie. "Why should I be loyal? She tormented me for seven years."

I asked how, but she could only scream, "In a million ways. She was a monster! It was like living with one of the dead."

She could not say what it was poor Miss Wannop had done, but she burst forth into a life history of the old woman. "You want to know what she was like? Well, she never had a friend . . . never since I knew her . . . but harpies like Madame la Duchesse and Monsieur le Marquis. She used to buy things, furniture and pictures and porcelain, from people like you, respectable people of position, just to get acquainted with them. But it never lasted. They saw her once or twice and that was the end. You were just like the others. The people she might have known were never good enough for her. Why, she had

to close her house because nobody would come to it and she couldn't get any servants to stay." Amélie began to weep. "Oh, sir, you don't know what I've put up with."

I didn't know and it seemed impossible to discover.

Amélie seized her bags and rushed from the room to marry Henri and carry on life. I was left alone. There was a faint noise in the adjoining bedroom and I discovered that with Miss Wannop was an undertaker with a blue-black beard. He was making her ready for her final rest.

I began poking about the room, looking for some clue to a will or the address of her lawyers, for anything, I must say, which would take from my shoulders the responsibility for this old lady whom I disliked so coldly. Presently I found the address of her lawyers. And I found also a pile of heavy books, expensively bound in red morocco and gold. I opened one of them. It was not an ordinary book, but one filled with pages of blank paper on which press cuttings had been pasted. There they were, page after page of them, many of them yellow with age, some of them clippings from the columns of *Mondanités* in French journals, some of them,

the recent ones, from the columns of the *Daily Mail* printed in the days since the Harmsworths discovered that Americans, too, meant circulation. "Among those who entertained at the unusually brilliant Sunday evening at the Ritz was Miss Savina Wannop, etc., etc." Going back through them one discovered all the names which had once given my mother many a laugh—the names of the world which she said did not exist. It was like a directory to some shabby niche in Hell filled with the ghosts of bankrupt grand dukes, bogus princes, broken-down opera singers, fake counts, swindling duchesses. This, then, had been the world of Miss Wannop. These books were the story of her life. She had lived for these books and now she was dead, alone, having captured only the ghosts of ruin and decay.

The voice of the undertaker interrupted my thoughts. He stood in the doorway rubbing his hands. "If you wish to look at Mademoiselle, she is ready."

I went because it seemed only decent that someone should care enough to look at her just once before the coffin was closed, someone who was not a servant, an undertaker or a hotel manager.

She was dressed in the black and purple dress in which I had first seen her, but the jewels were missing. Feeling my responsibility, I asked the undertaker what had become of them.

"I have them," he said. "A woman came and tried to take them, but I know the law and I refused to let her have them. She said she was Miss Wannop's sister."

"Sister!" I said. "But she had no sister." A suspicion rose swiftly. "What did the woman look like?"

He described her—a large woman, he said, with diamond earrings and many diamonds on her fingers. Her hair, he thought—well, perhaps nature had never produced so vivid a red. And she was, he thought, perhaps an untidy eater. She was very fat and much painted.

I asked him to leave me alone for a moment, and then I knelt to pray by the old woman whose "friend" had tried to rob her as she lay dead. When I had finished I stood for a long time looking down at the old face. In death it was more than ever like marble, more delicate and aristocratic and more than ever vacant of all emotion, of all passion, of all character. It was empty and in

its peculiar emptiness there was a kind of horror and repulsion. I could understand a little what Amélie had not been able to put into words.

And then suddenly I became aware that I was being watched by someone or something and that the curtain at the window was moving ever so slightly. Looking down, I saw a soiled white paw emerge, and a moment later I was looking into a pair of empty china-blue eyes faintly rimmed with pink. For a moment I experienced a wild sensation of horror and madness, for I was looking into the living eyes of Miss Savina Wannop. Then I knew suddenly and was relieved. It was the Cat that lived at the Ritz. He had found her out at the very end, when she could no longer scream or faint or escape. But the eyes were the eyes of Miss Savina Wannop. Suddenly I understood. I knew that my prayer for her soul had been useless, because Miss Wannop had never had any soul. She was exactly like the cat of which she had such a horror.

Driving the animal before me, I closed the door on the last of those who had lived among us so long that they were really French. The cat scurried down the stair and from the well arose

the sound of American voices and the tinkle of ice in American cocktail glasses. Something more than Miss Savina Wannop lay dead in the room next to the *porcelaine de Saxe*.

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· II ·

MR. ROSIE AND MAY

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

MR. ROSIE *and* MAY

"HAVE another," said Sadie. "This time it's furniture polish."

Mr. Wigglesworth hung his derby on the vase of imitation Sèvres that stood on the mantelpiece, lighted a cigar and held out his glass.

"You surtenly are a strong silent man," said Sadie.

"You're three ahead of me."

Mr. Wigglesworth looked at her and then raised his glass and drank. "Here's to Mr. Rosie and May. One more bastard less!"

Sadie began to weep. She drank and began to

comb her hair. "It ain't him I'm thinkin' about. It's her. Poor Rosie. Taking it hard when Gawd removes a thing like him from you. I suppose it was his droppin' off sudden shocked her. He wasn't no good, but I suppose a husband's a husband. It's a kind of a principle. You get used to havin' a husband around, even a thing like Clarence."

Mr. Wigglesworth looked at her wearily. "Well, he's dead now!"

Sadie stopped combing her hair. "Yes, thank Gawd! She can save some money now."

A long silence followed her remark. Mr. Wigglesworth regarded himself in the mirror. Presently he said, "I thought this was goin' to be a party."

"Well, you gotta show some respeck. You can't jazz it up with his ashes right in the same house with yuh. You gotta pretend for Rosie's sake. It ain't decent not to. I was brought up right. You gotta show some respeck."

Mr. Wigglesworth, who publicly was a salesman of spare parts for radios, walked over to the absent Rosie's radio. He turned a dial. There was a guttural explosion, a splutter, and then Rosie La-

touche's hotel suite was filled with the blare and uproar of saxophones, trombones and kettledrums.

Sadie got up. "Shut off that Goddam thing! Ain't you got any respeck!"

Mr. Wigglesworth turned to see Sadie taking another. With a fillip of the wrist he filled the room with new sounds that were deep, mellow and rumbling. The grand organ of the Palladium, the World's Largest Motion Picture Palace, poured into Rosie's flat.

"Ease it down," said Sadie. "I ain't deef."

Mr. Wigglesworth eased it down.

"That's the news reel," said Sadie. "Rosie comes on right after that." She applied thick, greasy rouge to her lips, creating a skilful and delicate Cupid's bow which bore no relation to the overripe mouth given her by nature.

Mr. Wigglesworth turned a gloomy back upon her and stood staring down into Forty-ninth Street. It was a wet night. On the corner the colossal electric sign of the Palladium Motion Picture Palace mirrored its extravagant red, green, and yellow lights in the wet asphalt.

"This cremation business is good stuff," said Sadie. "I'm all for sanitation, and it's better havin'

his ashes round than his corpse. Why, there ain't even room for a corpse in this flat. Where'd they put a corpse? I ask you?" She took another drink. "And it ain't so depressin'. Yuh don't feel the same way about ashes."

Across the street in the doorway of the Hotel Barcelona, three men stood with their collars turned up and their hats pulled down watching the passersby. An old woman went by, drenched by the rain but holding her newspapers under her shawl to keep them dry. A taxicab skidded into the curb and bounced off again.

"It's a funny thing—his wantin' to be cremated."

Mr. Wigglesworth had nothing to say to this.

"And wantin' his ashes strewn on the bosom of the East River."

Mr. Wigglesworth answered without turning. "Mebbe he hoped some of 'em would be washed up on the Island where he'd feel home-like."

"Well, he's dead now."

Across the street a man and a woman came out of the door of Marco's Independent Vaudeville. They turned and went into Tony's speakeasy. Around his cigar, Mr. Wigglesworth

remarked, "Margery's act's over. I just seen her and Herman goin' into Tony's place."

"Mebbe we'd better ask 'em in. It'd cheer Rosie up mebbe to see some friends."

"What about respeck?"

"She ain't seen Margery since she made the movie houses and Margery got into the three a day. It'll give both of 'em somethin' to high hat each other about."

"Margery'll be tellin' all about her new act."

"It ain't so hot. Variety said if she'd thought it up when she was thirty years younger it mighta gone big."

Mr. Wigglesworth turned a little from his post at the window. Sadie was taking another. She seemed more cheerful. Beside him the radio suddenly became a voice, rich, barytone and elocutional. It was announcing a number entitled "*My Hot Steppin' Baby ain't no slow steppin' maybe! He's always on the job.*"

"That's her number," said Sadie. "Hers and May's. She's goin' on now."

Mr. Wigglesworth again remained silent and absorbed in the view of Forty-ninth Street.

"Poor kid," said Sadie. "It's kinda like dancin'

on her husband's grave. Havin' to go on with her husban' barely in his coffin."

"He ain't in a coffin," observed Mr. Wigglesworth.

"Well, in whatever you call it . . . a container. That's what art is. You don't know, Eddie, what it is to be an artiste."

Mr. Wigglesworth grunted. "I thought it was all settled that he was a bum."

Sadie began to repeat herself. "Well, a husban's a husban'. And a husban's ashes are a husban's ashes. You gotta show *some* respeck."

"Yeh," said Mr. Wigglesworth. He turned and took one look at Sadie and one at the bottle.

"What about another?" asked Sadie. "It's a wet night."

Mr. Wigglesworth did not deny this. He took another and returned to the window. On the radio the blare of the Grand Symphony Orchestra of the Palladium Theatre took the place of the grand Cathedral Organ. Against the sound ran the thread of Rosie's high, shrill voice, singing, "*My Red Hot Baby ain't no small time maybe,*" and the sound of the Latouche Sisters' feet pattering against the rhythm.

"Dancin' on her husban's coffin," repeated Sadie gloomily.

"She's off the beat," observed Mr. Wigglesworth.

"Whatta you know about beats?"

Without turning Mr. Wigglesworth said, "Are yuh lookin' for a fight?"

"No."

"If you wanna fight, I'll stage a big one. I'm just feelin' right."

"What does a common bootlegger like you know about Rosie's art?"

"I know when a common hoofer's off the beat."

"I suppose you wanna beat me up again."

Mr. Wigglesworth did not answer. He was listening intently. So Sadie said once more and with a slightly greater challenge in her voice: "I suppose you wanna beat me up again." Still Mr. Wigglesworth was silent.

"I wanna tell you, if you ever beat me up again I'll haul you up for it."

Mr. Wigglesworth was listening with an intense concentration.

"There's sumpin' the matter with Rosie," he said. "She can't keep on the key."

["Poor

"Poor kid!" said Sadie. "Dancin' on her husban's coffin!"

"It ain't a coffin," persisted Mr. Wigglesworth, and then after a moment's careful listening, "She don't sound so melancholy."

Sadie ignored this. "*My Red Hot Baby*" came to an end. There was a pause and a thin scatter of applause.

"It's a flop," said Mr. Wigglesworth. "She's queered it."

From a series of wet crackles came the familiar elocutionary barytone. "You have just heard the Latouche Sisters, 'Rosie and May,' singing '*My Red Hot Baby ain't no small time maybe*' broadcasted by——"

"That guy sure has sex appeal in his voice," observed Sadie.

"Yeah?" said Mr. Wigglesworth. "Well, it ain't the voice that matters."

The voice continued, "—by Station LMNO, Nussbaum's Department Store, by special arrangement direct from the stage of the World's Largest Motion Picture Palace, the Palladium Theatre, now showing 'A Girl's Man' with Almerita Tancred and Alonzo Vaness. Please stand by."

"Aw, shut up!" said Mr. Wigglesworth and throttled the beautiful voice with a deft turn of the wrist.

"I never thought you was jealous of a voice."

Outside, the rain fell in ropes and spirals. Through it emerged from the door of Tony's place two drenched and unsteady figures. Mr. Wigglesworth pushed open the window, took the cigar out of his mouth, and yelled, "Hey, Margy, come on up! We're celebratin'!"

For a moment two faces turned up, searching the windows of the Eldorado Hotel, and then the two forms crossed the street to the entrance just beneath the window which framed the lean, tubercular form of Mr. Wigglesworth. It took them some time to cross as they seemed unable to maintain a straight course.

"What d'you mean, celebratin'?" asked Sadie. "That ain't the word to use at a time like this."

"Well, if we ain't celebratin', what are we doin'?"

Sadie took up the bottle. "Have another. It's a wet night."

They each had another, Mr. Wigglesworth re-

turned to the window and Sadie said, "Rosie ain't even got a container yet."

"What d'you mean—container?"

"A what you may call it? A urn—for his ashes. She ain't had time, what with rehearsals and a new act goin' on. They asted her to call at the Funeral Chapel and s'lect one, but she ain't had time. She ain't had time."

"What's the matter with the thing he's already in—that thing on the mantel." Mr. Wigglesworth went over to the yellow oak mantel and took up a circular metal box painted black. "If she's gonna throw him in the East River what's the use of havin' a urn?" He peered at the metal box and shook it gently, listening with concentration. Then he looked at Sadie, "It certainly is convenient. He don't take up much space now."

"It's gotta be impressive," said Sadie. "She can't pour the ashes outova common tin can like that. It'd look like she was emptyin' her combin' box in the East River, if there was such a thing as a combin' box. A girl can't do that. She's gotta have a bronz urn so she can hold it in her hand when the press guy clicks his box. You know—'Famous Dancer Scatters Ashes of Beloved Hus-

ban' upon Bosom of East River.' It's gotta be impressive. It's gotta be impressive. I keep tellin' her, 'Rosie, it's gotta be impressive.' "

With an exaggerated care, Mr. Wigglesworth replaced the black tin box on the mantelpiece.

"Sure," he said. "Rosie otta at least get some publicity outa that cokey."

The door opened. It was Margery and her husband. Margery grasped the end of the upright piano for support (she was a large peroxide), and then cried out, "Well, for cryin' out loud, if it ain't Sadie Beimeister!"

"Guess again; it's Amy McFeerson," said Sadie.

"I ain't seen you since we played Skowhegan Falls. What you been doin' with yourself?"

She encircled Sadie in a pair of fat arms and gave her a large wet kiss.

"I'm at leisure," said Sadie, giving a hard look toward Mr. Wigglesworth. "Anyway, that's what they call it."

Mr. Wigglesworth did not notice her.

Margery's husband was introduced to Sadie. The wet night had depressed him. He hovered like a shadow behind Margery.

"Whatya celebratin'?" asked Margery.

["Ain't

"Ain't you heard?" said Sadie.

"No."

"Rosie Latouche's husban's dead."

"No. When?"

"Day before yesterday."

Tears came into Margery's china-blue eyes. "No, you don't mean it! Him? Mr. Rosie and May. She'll miss him. I say she otta thank Gawd. If ever a husban' was a drag on a woman's career!"

Her head cleared a little and her thoughts became concrete. "Where is he? Laid out at Heely's place?"

"Naw, he's right here."

Margery looked alarmed. "Where?"

Sadie pointed to the black box on the mantelpiece. "That's him."

"Cree*may*ted?"

"Cree*may*ted."

Margery took up the tin box gently and shook it a little, listening sadly with her fuzzy blonde head on one side. Then in silence she put it down with great caution, but she placed it too near the edge of the mantel and it fell. She caught it skilfully and when she had regained her own balance

put it down a second time with greater care and greater success. "So it's a wake you're havin'?"

"Yeah. A wake."

"I ain't never been to a wake with the remains in ashes."

Mr. Wigglesworth was opening the window. "Come on up, Al, we're celebratin'!" he called.

Sadie yelled at him. "Whatya doin'? Askin' in every bum you see?"

Margery's husband was drawn to the radio as a piece of iron to a magnet. He lacked Mr. Wigglesworth's skill of manipulation, and it began to shriek and groan and crackle.

Sadie held up the bottle. "How about a fresh-ener? It's a wet night." She addressed the room in a voice which steadily grew louder. Margery came over to the table and Margery's husband got a toothbrush mug out of the bathroom. Sadie filled the two receptacles. Mr. Wigglesworth, with a few nonchalant spins of several dials, filled the room with the sound of the Babylon Hotel Roof jazz band playing "What's my Baby waitin' for tonight?" Margery threw her hat on the floor and ran her fat, beringed fingers through her peroxide curls.

"It's awful how these tight hats make you sweat!"

The door opened and Al oozed in, dripping rain across the carpet. He hung his wet Fedora on top of Mr. Wigglesworth's damp derby, and Margery shouted, "Well, for cryin' out loud, if it ain't Al!" She gave him a large wet kiss, and addressed the room, "Al and me ain't seen each other since he closed his trained seal act in Troy. It's a regler reunion, this is."

Margery's husband was turning dials on the radio and producing grumbles, roars, and shrieks. "Lots of static tonight," said Margery amiably.

"Have a drink, Al," said Sadie. "It's a wet night."

He had a drink and Margery said, "It's a wake, Al . . . a real old-fashioned wake. It's Rosie's husband. That's him, over there on the mantel."

Al looked uneasy and took a large drink. Mr. Wigglesworth was opening the window again. "Hey, Gertie! Come on up and bring yer boy friend! We're holdin' a celebration!" He closed the window again.

"Yer radio seems to need oilin'," observed Al.

Mr. Wigglesworth quietly throttled it once

more. Sadie said, "Say, Margery, how's the new act?"

Mr. Wigglesworth turned and looked at her, hard.

"Ain't you seen it yet?" asked Margery. "Oh, *you* seen it, Al. When?"

"Tonight."

"Tonight! It wasn't so good tonight. You otta seen it Tuesday." She started pulling her dress down over her fat shoulders, "Yuh see, it's like this. I come on all dressed in a creation covered with sequins. Shows off the figure fine. I gottan old-fashioned figure and I'm proud of it. See? I'm proud of it. Get that?"

"Yeah," said Al. "You gottan old-fashioned figure and you're proud of it."

"And it goes big with the hicks. Well, it's like this. I come on all in sequins and with a big pink hat and carryin' a handorgan and attached to the handorgan by a string is Herman over there, all dressed up like a monkey. And he walks along the orchestra pit and climbs into the boxes pretending to collect nickels."

"I'll bet he gets 'em sometimes too," said Al.

Margery ignored him. "And then he runs up

to the piana and sits at it and pretends he's a real monkey and can't play a note and makes discords. That part goes big. An' then I give him a banana and he begins and I sing. Yeh heard my new song?"

"Sure," said Al. "I just got through hearin' it, didn't I?"

"Herman wrote it. It's called '*Roses are now but a memory.*' It's a waltz song. Yeh. Waltzes are comin' in again. Lookit 'Ramona.' This jazz stuff can't last. Herman! Herman! Let that radio alone and come an' play my accomp'niment. Herman is just nuts on radios."

Herman came over and after striking a few false notes found himself and began to play. Margery laid her bosom on the top of the piano and sang in a loud soprano voice.

"Have another," said Sadie to Al. "You'll need it after this."

The door opened and Gertie and her boy friend came in. Sadie poured the drinks and they all sat on the stuffed sofa. While Margery sang, Sadie explained about Rosie's husband and all.

"*Ro-osesz are naow but a memaree!*" sang Mar-

gery. *"Ro-o-osesz that meyun but good-byee!"* Nobody paid any attention to her.

Mr. Wigglesworth still looked out of the grimy window. Across the street against the lighted doorway of the Hotel Barcelona moved the figure of a woman who seemed not quite sure of her destination. She wore a long black veil and was without an umbrella. The veil hung in a wet rope down her thin back. She leaned against the rail of Tony's place and looked about her. Mr. Wigglesworth opened the window and shouted, "Hey, Rosie! This is where yeh live!" He closed the window again.

"Ro-o-osesz are naow but a memaree!" sang Margery. She was sweating hard. The song came to an end in a little flock of trills executed with great concentration by Herman.

"Have another," said Sadie. "This time it's varnish!"

Gertie's boy friend snored and Al pushed himself in between him and Gertie.

Margery was talking again. "And then Herman, see, climbs on top of the piana and—this part goes big. He pretends he's hunting for a flea. He climbs on toppa the piana. . . . Climb on toppa the piana, Herman."

MR. ROSIE AND MAY

Herman was back at the radio again. It began to squawk.

"It's a rotten act," said Sadie confidentially to Al. "Before I quit the two a day . . ."

"Yeah, I know," said Al. "It ain't what it used to be."

And then the door opened and the widow staggered in. She clung for a moment to the doorknob and wrung the water out of the end of her crape veil.

Sadie noticed her first. "Hello, Rosie. Where's May?"

"I ain't seen her since the show."

"Whatsa matter?" asked Al. "I wanna see her."

Margery put her arms about Rosie and gave her a wet kiss. "Rosie, dearie, I just heard and thought I'd drop in."

Rosie looked at her. "Heard what?"

"About him," said Margery. "About poor Clarence."

"Oh, *him*," said Rosie, and threw her hat on the floor.

Mr. Wigglesworth turned from his post at the window. "You'd better shut the door, Rosie, if you don't wanna get thrown outa the Eldorado."

MR. ROSIE AND MAY

Rosie slammed the door. "May, the slut, said I was tight tonight; she said I queered the act."

"It's a lie," said Sadie. "She's a dirty liar."

"I never seen a soberer woman," said Al.

"I gotta right to get drunk if I wanna. Ain't I?"

"Sure you have, dearie," said Margery.

"I gotta right to celebrate."

"With her husban' dead at home. It's like dancin' on his coffin," said Sadie.

"It ain't a coffin," said Mr. Wigglesworth.

Herman guided the radio into the Middelbottom Chain Grocery Stores Stringed Quartet in an hour of Classical Music. Again Mr. Wigglesworth said, "Aw, shut up!" and throttled the thing. Margery's husband gave him a hurt but cunning look.

"Have a drink, dearie," said Sadie to Rosie. "That's what yuh need on a night like this. Just one drink'll do a lot for yuh."

Margery was saying, "And then Herman gets up on the piana. Remember, he's dressed like a monkey all the time and I'm in sequins with a big pink hat. Well, Herman gets up on the piana—and this part goes big. Herman, get up on the piana like you do in the act."

[Herman

Herman got up on the piano, knocking down a photograph of the late Mr. Rosie and May. It lay forgotten on the floor.

"They've delivered him," whispered Sadie to Rosie.

"Who?"

"*Him.* That's him on the mantel."

Rosie took a deep drink and a long look at the box on the mantel. She said nothing.

"I think we otta put him in the bathroom," said Sadie. "It ain't decent, havin' him in here."

Rosie grew reminiscent. "He was a great one for parties. The more whoopee, the better. Let him rest there till I finish my drink. He ain't sufferin' the way I am."

"They ast if you was comin' tomorra to choose a container."

"What say?" asked Gertie, waking suddenly.

"A container . . . a urn, I mean. I say Rosie otta get a container, I mean a urn. You gotta have a urn, Rosie, for the ceremony. It's gotta be impressive. You know, headlines and pictures in the *Graphic,* 'Well-known Actress Scatters Ashes of Dead Husband on Bosom of East River.' "

"Bosoms," said Al, "is outa fashion except with Margery."

"You gotta do it right, Rosie, photographs and a lotta publicity an' everything. It's gotta be impressive."

"A urn," repeated Rosie dimly. "A urn."

"It's gotta be impressive."

Margery's husband had got back again to the radio and the Middelbottom Chain Grocery's Stringed Quartet poured a Liebestraum unheeded into Rosie's flat.

"How'd I sound on the radio?" asked Rosie.

Mr. Wigglesworth answered her without turning from the window. "Rotten! May was right."

Rosie looked at Sadie. "What's he mean?"

"Never mind, dearie. Don't mind him. Nothin' suits him tonight. You was wonderful."

Margery was saying, "An' then Herman gets inside the piana. Of course, Herman can't show you. He can't get inside an upright piana . . . "

Suddenly Gertie addressed Rosie. "I gottan idea. I gottan idea."

"No," said Mr. Wigglesworth.

"What about?" asked Sadie.

"For a container . . . a urn, I mean. What about

one of them vases for a urn?" She indicated the imitation Sèvres vase adorned by the damp hats of Al and Mr. Wigglesworth. Rosie regarded it.

"It's artistic," said Sadie. "In a pitcher, it'd look just like a urn."

Rosie's pink-nailed fingers began a slow, groping movement in her short, mahogany hair.

Gertie asked, "Where's the other one, Rosie? There used to be a pair of 'em."

Rosie didn't answer her. She appeared lost in thought. The fingers came to rest on a spot on the top of her head. Behind Rosie's back, Sadie began making signs to silence Gertie on the subject of the missing vase. Then Rosie finished her drink, got up and went over to the mantel, where she carefully took down the black lacquered box and, holding it against her ear, shook it gently.

"Where yuh goin'?" asked Sadie.

"I'm gonna put him in the bathroom where it's quiet."

"Nobody's got any respeck," said Sadie. "Nobody's got any respeck. Have another, Gertie. It's a wet night."

Rosie disappeared into the bathroom and Gertie turned to Sadie. "What've I done? What you

makin' shush signs to me for? I ain't said anything."

"You oughtn't to have spoke of them vases. It reminds her of poor Clarence. He broke the other one throwin' it at her. She's gotta scar that long on the top of her scalp."

Rosie didn't close the door of the bathroom and a moment later there was a sound of rushing water. Then, unsteadily but with an air of dignity, Rosie reappeared in the doorway. She was bearing the black lacquered box. The lid was off and it had a fearful air of being empty.

"Whatya been doin', dearie?" asked Sadie.

"I've been layin' Clarence to rest." She put the canister down on top of the piano. Its awful emptiness reverberated as it struck the teakwood. "I put him to rest, all right, an' he got his last wish. In a minute or two he'll be on the bosom of the East River, all right."

Mr. Wigglesworth turned from the window. "No, he won't."

Sadie glared at him. "Why not?"

"Because I used to have a job in the sewage department."

"What's that got to do with it?"

["Well,

"Well, the sewage from this part of town goes into the North River." He turned again to regard life in wet Forty-ninth Street.

Rosie began to cry. "And now he ain't got his last wish! An' it was the last thing he ast!"

Sadie drew her down to the sofa and began to pat her arm. "Never you mind, dearie. It ain't true. Don't you believe a word he says. What's he know about where sewage goes, a common bootlegger like him? Never mind the old killjoy, Rosie, he's been tryin' to queer the party all evenin'. Have another drink, dearie. That's what yuh need on a wet night like this. There now! Don't you mind a killjoy like Eddie."

Margery was saying, "And then for a encore, I sing '*Roses are now but a memory*' and we do a quick finish. Oh, no. I forgot. A little earlier in the act Herman jumps from the piana to the chandelier. You can do that here, Herman. That's easy. Show 'em how you jump from the piana to the chandelier."

On the radio the beautiful elocutionary voice was saying, "You have just listened to an hour of classical music by the String Quartet of the Middel-

bottom Chain Grocery Stores. The Quartet gives an hour of music every evening at—"

There was a sudden crash, a sputter of light and sparks and the sound of breaking glass. Herman had just jumped from the piano to the chandelier.

"Please stand by," said a beautiful barytone voice.

Mr. Wigglesworth shifted a dial. "Aw, shut up!"

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· III ·

THE LIFE OF LOUISE MILBROOK

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

"YES, she was a wonderful daughter to him. She'll always have that to think of, no matter what happens."

The old woman, dowdy and fat and swathed in rusty crape that had witnessed a hundred funerals, sat on the edge of the collapsible chair, peering between black shoulders at a coffin covered feebly with meager carnations and tuberoses and autumn flowers. Among these shown resplendently two or three great bursts of roses sent by distant rich relations from a Park Avenue florist. The thin woman beside her wiped the red tip of her nose and sniffed the heavy-scented air.

["Yes,"

"Yes," she said, "she need never reproach herself for having neglected him. She gave up her life to him."

The fat woman said, "Have you noticed the sweet expression it's given her? I tell you the lives of people show in their faces. She looks like a saint."

They knew, then, I thought, how she looked when her face was not hidden by the horrible black veil, for nothing was visible of Louise. Her head, bowed a little as she sat beside her father's coffin, was completely obscured by thick black cloth. I wondered whether she herself could see through it to discover me sitting there far at the back among the old women who loved funerals.

"Shhh!" hissed the thin woman, and in the cramped shabby flat where the sunlight never entered, the fat little priest began. . . . *I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord* . . .

It was the shabby funeral of a man who had come down in the world; for what lay in the coffin now had come into the world seventy years earlier rich and well-born. They sat there—the mourners—a strange assortment of remote and seedy cousins who came out of the earth only when

there was a funeral in the family. They were immensely old and respectable men and women, worn down to pettiness by poverty and obscurity, who rarely saw each other save at funerals where they spoke of dear Cousin Laura and dear Cousin Kate. In their midst, and with a vulgarity that emanated like a cloud from their furs and broadcloths and pearls, cowered two rich relatives who in the midst of a decaying family had managed to keep their heads above water. They sat here uneasily, as if the poverty of all the others whom they pitied was in some way a reproach to themselves. They were the ones who, as if to ease their consciences, had sent the great bursts of expensive roses that made the other flowers seem only more shabby and pitiful.

And last of all there was myself, who had nothing to do with any of the others, who was not even an obscure cousin, but only a healthy, prosperous, middle-aged man with a happy home and children, who had come only because once long ago he had been in love with Louise Milbrook.

For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday: seeing that is past as a watch in the night.

[And

And now at last old Milbrook lay in his coffin and a score of people had gathered to mourn him on this dreary January day. Why? He was a man who had been kind to none, not even to his own wife and children. He had wasted his money and brought them to the aching poverty that must keep up appearances. All of us, even the two crape-laden women beside me, knew him as a monster of selfishness. We had all watched him slipping down, down, down from one house to another, each smaller than the last, from one flat to another, each shabbier than the last, until it had all come to an end on the fringes of the fashionable world, in a street where crowds of urchins stood outside waiting until John Milbrook came down to take his last ride. None of us, in the stuffy little room, had loved him. Perhaps it was Louise whom we loved and respected, sitting there, the last of her family, her head bowed a little over her frail body. Perhaps *she* had loved him, for she had stayed by him until the end, watching, spoiling him, reading to him, playing matador through endless evenings, gratifying his slightest whim while together they slipped down, down, down . . .

THE LIFE OF LOUISE MILBROOK

O teach us to number our days: that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

The priest was fat and oily like a white worm and he read in a bored, monotonous, mechanical voice, hurrying as much as he dared. He was an office boy of the church (they had not bothered to send the rector, who had a fashionable funeral at the same hour), but he was good enough to bury old Milbrook, who ten years ago had been forced to give up his pew in fashionable St. Bart's. Still, it would look well in the papers . . . "The Reverend So-and-So, curate of St. Bart's." It would be the last faint echo in the world from which the Milbrooks had fallen.

The sound of a funeral whisper at my side: "I hate the smell of tuberoses." The two old women sniffed the air. "They're so sickening!"

Tuberoses! It was the scent of tuberoses, thick and heavy, drifting up from the terraced gardens of Nice that enveloped us as we sat in the moonlight—how long ago?—more than twenty years, at least. Louise, pale and lovely, in a lilac gown, who blushed and clung to my hand while I talked to her.

Louise saying, "I *do* love you. Don't think it's

because I don't." And then weeping silently. "But Father . . . You see, he's left alone so much since Mother died, and he's so helpless. I can't leave him just yet. I *do* love you, Robert. I do."

So we had parted.

And again in Paris a long time afterward. "If we could only wait a little time. Father is so helpless and unhappy. Wait a little time!"

Wait! Wait for what? For this. It was only now, twenty years after, that John Milbrook's leathery, sodden old face lay still at last in his coffin.

Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, in His wise providence, to take out of this world the soul of our deceased brother . . .

In His providence! Perhaps it was just that. In His providence, Almighty God had set her free. She might be free now. She might be happy. She might marry. She might lift the veil of crape that hid her frail beauty and look out upon a new world in which she might begin at last to live!

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all for evermore. Amen.

They were shutting in old Milbrook until Judg-

ment Day, and in the shabby room laden with the scent of tuberoses I rose to hurry away. I almost ran, but somehow in the mazes of the narrow hall I came suddenly full upon the one person I had hoped to escape. She stood in the shadows, startled, staring at me through the thick veil as if she had not seen an old lover, married, middle-aged and happy, but some terrifying ghost. Then she sighed, "Thank you, Robert. It was good of you to remember us."

Slowly she raised her veil to smile at me, wistfully. The face was old and lined and worn like the face of an old, old woman. There was the soft thud of a coffin lid being closed in the dreary parlor. Into the coffin they were shutting more than the body of selfish old John Milbrook. They had shut into it something far more precious than all his existence.

The scent of the tuberoses hung thick in the air. Behind me, the fat old lady, pushing for a better view of the coffin, was telling someone else, "Yes, she was a wonderful daughter to him. She can always remember that, no matter what happens."

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· IV ·

THE LIFE OF ZENOBIA WHITE

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

The LIFE *of* ZENOBIA WHITE

ZENOBIA WHITE is dead. This morning, as I came down to breakfast, I saw running up the lane from the highroad the breathless, dripping Jabez Smith, who lives on the next farm. When he saw me, he cried out, "Zenobia White is dead!" And then he fell silent, embarrassed, speechless, as if he understood at once how silly it was to be so excited over the death of a queer old woman who had lived for almost a century. I knew why he was excited, though Jabez did not. He stood there, freckled and awkward in the sun, waiting my questions. . . .

[He

He knew that this was exciting news, but he did not know why it seemed so important or why he was so excited.

"Zenobia White is dead!"

With the death of Zenobia White something had gone out of our world. . . . Who could say what it was? Something that had passed and gone forever.

She had been dead for three days, said Jabez. They only discovered it after Zenobia's dogs had howled for hours on end until Jabez' father had gone to discover the cause of their howling. He walked in through the thicket of lilacs and syringas and locusts surrounding her house. "Even the birds," said Jabez, "were quiet." He walked through the chickens and cats and mongrel dogs up to the door and knocked; but there was no answer. He went in, and there lay Zenobia, dressed in a wedding-gown of white silk, with a wedding-veil over her face. She was dead, and the stuff of the wedding-dress was so old that it had turned yellow. It must have been made seventy years before.

Thus something had gone out of our little world. I should never see Zenobia White again walking with her fantastic disordered dress of yellow taf-

feta and black lace, trailing its long train in the dust of the highway, a basket over one arm, her black lace mitts adjusted neatly . . . walking down the highway, very tall and straight and proud, her black eyes flashing beneath the little veil of black lace that hung from the brim of her queer, bedraggled bonnet. . . . Zenobia White . . . immensely old, more than a hundred perhaps, who had lived, as far back as any of us could remember, in a little house covered with vines that stood behind a great barrier of bushes down by the covered bridge. Zenobia White, immensely fierce and old, who dressed always in yellow taffeta like Sarah Bernhardt in the picture painted by Carolus-Duran.

Zenobia White, who had never married, was dead in her wedding-dress, a dress made seventy years ago, before I was born.

Jabez Smith, still puzzled, withdrew, and Zenobia White took possession of me. As far back as my father could remember, she had lived in the untidy old house. Animals came to her without fear. The very birds in her garden were tame. The thrushes and the cardinals abounded. In the cupola of her tiny house, there were whole colonies of martins. Stray dogs came to her . . . the stray dogs,

[yellow

yellow and spotted, without name or breed, who had howled on the morning when Zenobia had not come out to feed them. And cats were there, great numbers of cats who lived in peace with the dogs and who followed her in a grotesque procession a little distance down the road when she set out in the morning in the trailing gown of yellow taffeta to do her marketing. . . .

And the old white horse. For twenty years, the white horse had lived inside her fence, guarding her. No one could enter the little white gate without meeting the old white horse, his teeth bared savagely. He had never known harness or bit in twenty years. Only this morning, when Zenobia lay dead in her wedding-dress, he had not attacked Jabez' father. He had stood sadly, waiting. . . .

Within my own memory and the memory of my father, Zenobia White had always lived thus. To get at the roots of things it was necessary to go back, far back into the days of my grandfather. He had known Zenobia White when she was a beauty, tall and black-eyed, defiant and proud, who sat a horse like an Amazon. But even in those days, she had lived alone in the little cottage where her father had died. The mother of Zenobia White

had been an Indian woman, an Iroquois princess, who died soon after she was born, and at twenty Zenobia was left an orphan.

In those days there were prowlers and sometimes an Indian running amuck murdered a settler and his family, but Zenobia had stayed defiantly in her little house by the mill, armed with her father's pistols, scornful even of the talk which came of a young girl who had many admirers, living alone and unprotected. "But Zenobia," my grandfather had said, "could look out for herself." He knew, perhaps, because he had been among her admirers.

But he was not the favored one. Zenobia loved a young red-haired Scotch settler called Duncan McLeod, who was a man with as quick a temper as her own, a handsome man and the strongest runner in all the county. Zenobia had loved him with all the fierce passion of her nature. But their wild passion had not a smooth course. They had gone for a ride one night (so my grandfather said) and when they returned, Zenobia, sitting her horse proudly, rode a hundred paces ahead of him, for they had quarreled. And when they came to the little house (where Zenobia lay dead now in her wedding-dress) she turned in alone. They had

quarreled though it was but a day or two before the wedding, and she told him she would never see him again.

And then (my grandfather said) Zenobia had gone in and, barring the doors and windows against intruders and renegade Indians, she had taken down her Bible to read for a time in order to chasten her fierce, proud spirit. She sat reading thus in the silent, lonely house until midnight. It is possible to imagine the scene . . . a little house in a clearing in the woods where the owls cried out mournfully all through the night, and Zenobia alone there over her Bible, praying that the Lord might chasten her temper and bring her happiness. And then in the midst of this, the sound, faint and uncertain, of someone among the bushes of the garden, the sound of footsteps . . . the footsteps of one or perhaps a dozen men, for in the blackness of the night and with the sound of the river it was impossible to tell. And Zenobia rising slowly to pick up her father's pistol and go to the door and listen. Zenobia putting out the single mutton candle. Still the footsteps and the rustling . . . perhaps of the rising wind among the bushes and the faint ghostly hooting of the owls. And at

length Zenobia, raising her pistol, had fired through the door to frighten the intruders. The sound of a shot and then a silence while Zenobia stood there with the smoking pistol in her hand waiting . . . in the silence. They had gone away. . . . There was nothing but the sighing of the wind and the hoot of the owls. . . .

And in the morning (my grandfather said) she had been wakened by the sun streaming in at the window and the sound of the thrushes and cardinals in the garden. She woke to look at her wedding-dress, spread out on the chair near her bed. And when she had dressed and gone downstairs, she unbolted the doors and windows one by one until she came to the last, which opened into the garden. . . . And there on the path, face downward, lay Duncan McLeod, his red hair like flame in the sun . . . dead with a bullet through his heart.

I looked up and saw the figure of Jabez Smith, sitting now under a catalpa tree. He had forgotten that the hay was cut and there were clouds in the west. I knew what he was doing. He was trying to puzzle out why he had been excited be-

cause Zenobia White was dead. I would never see Zenobia White with her yellow taffeta trailing in the dust and followed by her cats. Something had gone out of our little world.

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· V ·

THE LIFE OF VERGIE WINTERS

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

The LIFE *of* VERGIE WINTERS

I CAN see her now as she used to come down the steps of her narrow house between the printer's office and the little shop of Rinehart, the German cobbler—little rickety steps, never in too good repair, especially as she grew older and the cost of everything increased and that mysterious money of hers seemed to go less and less far in the business of meeting the necessities of life. It was a house but one room wide, of wood and painted a dun color, the most ordinary and commonplace of houses which a stranger in the town would not even have noticed; yet until yes-

[yesterday,

terday, when they pulled it down, it was a house invested with an incalculable glamour and importance. It was a house of which no one spoke, a house which the Town, in its passionate desire to forget (which was really only a hypocrisy) raised into such importance that one thought of it when one forgot the monuments which had been built in the squares, parks and cemeteries to the leading citizens of the community, to the bankers, to the merchants, to the politicians who had made it (as people said with a curious and noncommittal tone which might have meant anything at all) "what it is today." One remembered it even when one forgot the shaft of granite raised in the public square to remind the Town that John Shadwell had been one of its leading citizens.

I can see her now—Vergie Winters—an old woman past eighty, coming painfully down those rickety steps, surrounded always by that wall of solitude which made her appear to take no notice of anyone in the world. Old Vergie Winters, whose dark eyes, at eighty, carried a look of tranquil, defiant victory. Vergie Winters, of whose house no one spoke, whose door had been stoned by boys too young to understand her story, who

only sensed dimly that she was the great pariah of the Town. Old Vergie Winters went on and on, long after John Shadwell was in his grave, refusing to give way, living there on the main street of the Town as if she were alone in the solitude of a desert. Sometimes she spoke to Rinehart the cobbler and sometimes to her neighbor on the other side, and of course in the shops they were forced to sell her things, though in one or two places they had even turned her away; and she had gone without a word, never trying to force her way anywhere.

It all began almost a century ago, before the Civil War, when one day Vergie Winters, tall and dark, with great, burning black eyes set in a cool, pale face, opened the door of her father's house to John Shadwell, tall and handsome and blond, the youngest, the cleverest lawyer in the Town. It happened so long ago that it seems now to have no more reality than a legend, especially when one remembers Vergie only as an immensely old woman coming painfully down her narrow, crooked steps. But it happened, it must have happened to have made of Vergie Winters so great a character

in all the community. It must have been the rare sort of love which comes like a stroke of lightning.

He would have married Vergie Winters, they said (the old ones who remembered the beginnings of Vergie's story and, before dying, passed it on to their children and grandchildren), but there was already a girl to whom John Shadwell was betrothed, and in the background a powerful father, and John Shadwell's career, which Vergie Winters, being only the daughter of a Bavarian immigrant farmer, could do nothing to aid.

Long afterward the Town said, "Look at her! You can see what a drag she would have been on him, with her queer, silent ways. A pity, too, for she was a beautiful girl."

But they never thought, of course, that if things had been different, Vergie Winters might not have been queer and silent; and now, looking back, one can see that they were quite wrong. It was not Vergie Winters who was a drag on his career. It was the other woman, John Shadwell's wife, who turned into a strange, whining, melancholy invalid before they had been married a year. And what could John Shadwell do? Desert her? It was not possible. And, in the way of such invalids, she

lived for more than forty years, forty dreary years, complaining, hypochondriac, nagging. She was alive and still complaining when her husband, a great, vigorous, handsome man who treated her patiently and with gentlemanly respect, was dead under the most shocking circumstances.

"It was a pity about John Shadwell's wife," people said. "And she's such a lady, too."

And Vergie Winters. She did not break her heart. She did not marry some stupid lout and give up her life to a dull unhappiness. She did not wither away into spinsterhood. She loved John Shadwell . . . who knows how passionately, how deeply, in the profound depths of her curious, remote soul? She left her parents ("to set herself up in dressmaking and millinery," so she said) and took a narrow, wooden house on Main Street, where she put up a card in the window and sold hats to the women of the Town. And before two years had passed, it was to this narrow house that John Shadwell came, secretly—it must have been with an amazing secrecy—for no one even suspected the visits for more than three years. She made no effort to be more friendly with people about her than was required by the simple rou-

tine of her trade. She lived placidly, with a strange, rich contentment, inside the walls of the narrow little house. One met her sometimes, usually after darkness had fallen, walking with her slow dignified step along the streets of the Town. But she was alone . . . always alone. (Who knows what a wealth of contentment, what riches of devotion, lay in that deep, impregnable silence?)

Only once in all those sixty years was she ever known to leave the house overnight and that was three years after John Shadwell was married, when she went away for a few months "to visit her aunt in Camden." It was not long after she returned that John Shadwell, "whose poor wife could never have any children," adopted a girl baby. His wife, it was said, made no protest so long as the child had a good nurse and did not worry her. She was "so miserable, always ailing. She would give anything in the world for the health some women had."

"You couldn't blame her," said the Town, "for feeling like that. They say she never has a moment's good, wholesome sleep."

John Shadwell went to the legislature, the young-

est man in the state to hold such an office. And when the time for re-election came, the fight was bitter and into it some enemy thrust the name of Vergie Winters. So the story spread and so the name of Vergie Winters went the way of most small town milliners. Millinery was a "fast" business and Vergie Winters was a "fast" woman. A committee called upon her and asked her to leave the Town. And John Shadwell did nothing. If he came to her defense, he was ruined at the very beginning of that precious career. So Vergie gave him up, but she did not leave the Town. In the little parlor with the hats in the window, she received the committee and in that calm, aloof way, she told them that they could not force her to leave. They could not prove that she had broken any law. She was a free citizen. She even looked at them, out of the depths of the dark, candid, eyes and lied.

"John Shadwell," she said, "is nothing to me. If he has come here once or twice, it is only because he is my lawyer."

She must protect John Shadwell.

And so she sent them away baffled, even perhaps a little intimidated . . . a committee of red-faced,

self-righteous townsmen who had known, some of them at least, women far worse than Vergie Winters.

But her trade dwindled. Women no longer came to her for hats, unless they were the shady ladies of the streets who cared nothing for reputations which had no existence. And Vergie Winters, perhaps because she needed desperately their trade, perhaps because it never occurred to her, in that terrible solitude to which she had dedicated her life, ever to judge them and turn them away, came to depend upon them for companionship. They came and sometimes they stayed to talk. A few of them were run out of town, but new ones always took their places, for in the Town despite all its high morality and the moral sermons hurled from pulpits there seemed to be a need for such ladies. They always went to Vergie Winters for their bonnets.

"She is such a lady. She has such a fine air," they said, and, "It's so restful sitting there in her cool parlor."

But their trade did her no good. "It only goes to show," said the Town.

Their coming was really the beginning of her

colossal solitude. She did not go away. She did not flee from the threats that sometimes came to her. She was sure of herself. She would not surrender. And she could wait. She effaced herself from the life of John Shadwell, and when the Town began putting two and two together, she was even forced to give up walking through the twilight in the direction of John Shadwell's house where, from the opposite side of the street, she could watch with a furtive eye the little girl who played on the lawn about the iron dogs and deer beneath the elms. She never went out except to buy the few things she needed to eat and for her trade. It was about this time that a shop run by a Presbyterian elder refused to sell her a spool of thread with which to sew the bright roses on the hats of the ladies of the streets. She did not make a scene; she did not even complain. She went quietly from the shop and never again passed through its doors.

But there were always the gay ladies. They came and went, but they were always there. They could not live without money, yet they always had it, though they toiled not nor span, to pay Vergie Winters for their hats. Some died; one or two were murdered in saloon brawls, but Vergie Win-

ters never turned them away. They were her only friends. One wonders what secrets, what confidences, they brought to Vergie Winters, sitting there in her narrow little house. One wonders what dark history of the Town's citizens went into the grave when Vergie Winters was carried down those narrow, rickety steps for the last time. But for all that she knew, she said nothing. She simply waited. Perhaps it was a fear of what she knew, of those dark secrets of a sort never inscribed on monuments to leading citizens, that saved Vergie Winters from worse than ostracism. One can't help thinking that somehow the Town stood always a little in awe of Vergie Winters and her quiet, dark solitude.

At last what she hoped—what she must have known—would happen, came to pass. One cold night while Vergie Winters sat sewing on the gay hats, a key turned in the lock and John Shadwell came back to her. He came in the face of scandal, or ruin, of everything, because he could not help himself. It had begun in a flash of lightning when Vergie Winters opened the door of her father's house to let him in, and now John Shadwell

found that it went on and on and on. . . . There was no stifling it.

Who can picture that return? Who can imagine the sudden upleaping in the calm, withdrawn soul of Vergie Winters, who had such faith in this love that she sacrificed all her life to it?

And so for years, John Shadwell came, on the occasions when he was not in Washington, to see Vergie Winters in the narrow wooden house. She kept on with her precarious trade, for she would never while he lived accept any money from him. Besides, she could not afford, for his sake, to arouse suspicions. For herself it did not matter; she could not be worse off.

Thus Vergie Winters and John Shadwell passed into middle age and there came a time when he no longer sought election, but instead became a power behind the throne, a man who shaped the "precious careers" of other men. He held power in the palm of his big hand and no longer depended on votes. He grew careless and one night he was seen by a negro stable-boy turning his key in the back door of Vergie Winters' little wooden house with the bonnets in the window.

After that there were women who crossed the

street in order to avoid passing the window with the gay bonnets, and children, hearing their parents whisper as they drove by on a summer evening, came to understand dimly that some evil monster lay hidden behind the neat, fringed curtains. They came to believe that the dun-colored house concealed some horrible unmentionable thing. Once, while John Shadwell was away in Washington, boys stoned the house and broke all the windows; but Vergie Winters said nothing. In the morning a Slovak glazier, who was new to the Town and had never heard of its Scarlet Woman, came and repaired the damage, and after he had gone she was seen coming down the narrow steps in that terrible pool of solitude as if nothing at all had happened. She had her basket over her arm. She was going to buy vegetables for her noon meal. She was tall and proud and indifferent. So far as anyone knew, she never spoke of the affair to John Shadwell. She wanted to spare him, it seemed, even such petty annoyances.

And then, as the years passed, she sometimes saw from her window (the only safe spot from which she might peep) the figure of John Shadwell's

adopted daughter, grown now into a girl of twenty. She must have watched her a thousand times, always in company with John Shadwell's sister, a large, bony spinster, as the pair came out of the shop on the corner and crossed the street so that a girl so young and innocent might not have to pass the house of Vergie Winters.

So she sat in the narrow, dun-colored house, working on at the gay bonnets, on the afternoon that John Shadwell's adopted daughter was married to a son of the Presbyterian elder who refused to sell Vergie Winters a spool of thread. Perhaps on that afternoon she had a visit from one of the ladies of the street, who sat talking to her (she was such a lady) while the girl in the bridal-dress walked down the aisle of the brick Presbyterian church, with no mother sitting in the pew on the right because John Shadwell's wife had been too much upset by the preparations for the wedding.

And one is certain that, late that night when the festivities were ended, the figure of a middle-aged man followed the shadows of the alley behind Vergie Winters' house and let himself in with a key he had carried for more than twenty years.

And one can hear him telling Vergie Winters who was at the wedding, and that there never was a prettier bride, and what music they played, and what there was at the wedding-breakfast, and assuring her, as he touched her hand gently, that the bit of lace she had given him had been used in the bridal-dress. He had told them that he bought it himself.

Then, slowly, the Town came to accept the state of affairs as a permanent scandal. One seldom spoke of it any longer. One simply knew that Vergie Winters and John Shadwell had been living together for years. He was rich, he was important, he was a power in politics, and now that his career no longer mattered, he grew indifferent and a little defiant. So far as John Shadwell was concerned, he was a leading citizen nearly seventy years old, the grandfather of children by his adopted daughter.

But with Vergie Winters? She still went her solitary way, making her few bonnets, grown a little old-fashioned now and démodé for all her conscientious reading of the fashion papers. (One can see her, slightly greyed, putting on her spec-

tacles and peering closely at the pages.) And still as she sat behind the lace curtains at her window, she saw the figure of John Shadwell's daughter, remote and upright and a little buxom, crossing the street and going down the opposite side; only instead of being led by John Shadwell's spinster sister, she was leading her own children now. And night after night the figure of John Shadwell, no longer an ardent lover, but an old man, followed the shadows of the alley (less and less furtively as he grew older) to turn the worn key in the lock and sit there all through the evening with Vergie Winters. What did they do? What did they say to each other in those long winter evenings now that passion was only a shadow and a memory?

And then one night John Shadwell's wife, peevish and fretful in her tight-closed bedroom smelling of stale medicines, sent for him at midnight to read to her, only to be told that he had not come in. And again at two o'clock, and again at three; still he had not come in. Even when the grey light filtered through the elms onto the iron dogs and deer, he had not returned. They knew then that he would never return, for he lay dead in Vergie Winters' narrow, dun-colored house, behind the

lace curtains and the gay bonnets. He had belonged to her always, in spite of anything they might do, and in that silent, powerful way of hers, she had known it from the beginning. In the end he came to Vergie Winters to die. . . .

It made great trouble and embarrassment and they were forced to wait until midnight of the following day before they were able to take John Shadwell's body from the house of Vergie Winters. And when they did take it, it went out of the same door which had opened so many times at the touch of the worn key, and along the shadows through which he had passed in life so many times on the way to the little house. But even then they were not able to keep the affair secret. The Town came to know it, and so shut out the last glimmer of tolerance for Vergie Winters. It was no longer a half-secret. It was a scandal which cast darkness upon the name of one of the men who had made the Town (as people said with a curious and non-committal tone which might have meant anything at all) "what it is today." The crime was Vergie Winters'. But she could not have cared, very much. . . . Vergie Winters, sitting there in her terrible solitude behind the lace cur-

tains, while the procession passed her house . . . first the band playing the Dead March from Saul and then the cabs containing John Shadwell's daughter, her husband and John Shadwell's grandchildren, and then one by one the cabs carrying the leading citizens.

The next morning she came down the steps as she had always done, in the same clothes, with the same air of abysmal indifference. She had not betrayed him during life, and in death she gave no sign. And she must have known that on that morning every eye she passed was turned upon her with a piercing gaze "to see how she took it."

For ten years longer, Vergie Winters lived in the narrow wooden house, growing poorer and poorer with the passing years. She saw the children of John Shadwell's adopted daughter grow into men and women and marry and have children of their own. But the scandal had grown stale now, though the legend persisted, and only a few must have remembered hazily that the old woman who sat behind the curtains was a great-grandmother. Until one morning the howling of the cat roused Rinehart, the German cobbler, who broke into

Vergie Winters' house and found her dead. And when they carried her down the rickety steps on her last journey, she went alone, without a band to play the Dead March from Saul and without a procession of carriages to follow her into that far corner of the cemetery (remote from the fine burial ground of the Shadwells) where they laid her to rest.

Yesterday they pulled down Vergie Winters' house. There is no monument to her memory, save the tiny stone at the head of her grave, paid for with the money saved out of what she earned by making bonnets for the gay ladies of the Town. But Vergie Winters is not dead. When one passes the gaping hole where the little house once stood, one thinks of Vergie Winters. When one passes the granite shaft raised to John Shadwell, one thinks, not of John Shadwell, but of Vergie Winters. When one sees a Shadwell grandchild or a Shadwell great-grandchild, one thinks of Vergie Winters. For now that time has begun a little to soften the Town, the memory of Vergie Winters has been kept fresh and green with a strange aroma of vague, indefinable romance. When the names

of those who crossed the street to avoid her narrow house are forgotten, the name of Vergie Winters will live. Why? Who can say? Was it because the Town never knew a woman called upon to show a faith so deep, a sacrifice so great, a devotion so vast?

I can see her still, an old woman of eighty, hobbling painfully down the rickety steps of her house, with that curious proud look upon her worn old face, and in the sharp, old eyes. It was a look which said, "Vergie Winters was right. John Shadwell belonged to her, in spite of anything they could do, from the very beginning!"

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· VI ·

THE URN

An Entirely American Story

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

The URN
An Entirely American Story

IT was a splendid and "fashionable" funeral, with many members of the American colony (that is to say, those whose names add a peculiar luster to the Social Column of the Paris *Daily Herald*) seated about the room. The religious element was also well represented: besides members of the more conventional sects, there were present Theosophists and Spiritualists, Buddhists and Yogis, New Thoughters, and Christian Scientists, for Mrs. Wimpole had always entertained an experimental attitude of mind toward religions, and having, as she observed, "a beautiful gift for

[friendship,"

friendship," she had picked up many acquaintances on her way through conversions to one or another of these sects. So they had come at her request to the funeral of her husband, most of them perhaps a trifle curious to see the service which she had planned herself, "as a sort of eclectic celebration of the mysteries of death." One or two of the more rakish and cynical members of the funeral audience held a secret belief that she had been waiting impatiently for her husband to die in order that she might try out this "eclectic service."

At the funeral people said, "There was never such a devoted wife before in the history of the world. She gave up everything for him, especially in those last years when he lingered so. She never left his side. . . . "

One or two thought, "That woman is a monster. . . . She devoured her husband slowly, bit by bit. He never escaped from her for a moment. She gave him no peace. . . . "

Even in death he had not escaped her. Imprisoned in the urn that stood on the Louis Philippe table were the ashes. To the very end she was using him as an object on which to practice the ter-

rible devotion which led her to say, "People say that my nature is almost too intense—it burns."

She was the center of interest. Dressed all in white like a bride, she sat upon a low dais directly before the urn that contained her husband's ashes. A wreath of tuberoses circled her hair just above the pince-nez that embraced a thick, rather too fleshy nose. The classical effect was somewhat marred by the tiny gold chain which led from the pince-nez to a patent gold spring that lay concealed in a fleur-de-lis pin on her ample bosom. Otherwise the contours were as Greek as could be hoped with a figure so full-bosomed and given to ample curves. A spray of tuberoses lay across her plump arms. During the ceremony her small blue eyes were fixed upon space with the expression of one who sees beyond the mists and confusion of this world.

Miss Hoskins, a gaunt, thin virgin, with prominent eyes, who had gone somewhat cynically through many conversions and tried almost as many faiths as the Bereaved herself, read the service in the overcrowded little salon of the house in the Rue Spontini, to which Lydia Wimpole had brought her husband after oil had been discovered in the back-

yard of their Arkansas home. The atmosphere was heavy with the thick scent of flowers, and Miss Hoskins, who was very nearsighted, read the service (all in verse of Lydia Wimpole's own making) haltingly and without regard for the exquisite rhythms. It was only at the moments when Miss Hoskins, reading uncertainly, found herself with an extra syllable on her hands that the countenance of Lydia Wimpole, sitting on the dais, dressed as the Bride of the Hereafter, changed its serene expression. At such times a dark and troubled look of exasperation crossed her countenance. She was an optimist. If she had not been, she would long ago have abandoned her religious adventures. When Miss Hoskins stumbled badly over the more passionate passages of the Song of Songs with which the Bereaved had chosen to end the service, the face did not change its expression. Mrs. Wimpole had not written the Song of Songs, so it was of no importance to her how it was read.

From time to time, a discreet and admiring murmur drifted up to the dais. She was certain of what they were saying. . . . "Doesn't she look

serene and lovely. She has made of death a beautiful thing!"

Everyone forgot the small bronze urn, embossed with the esoteric symbols of three religions. It seemed less the center, the reason for the occasion, than simply another piece of bric-à-brac in a room which already resembled a second-hand shop. In death Horace Wimpole was obscured as he had been in life.

2

The ashes were kept there on the table during the days of packing for the return to America. They were surrounded always by a wreath of fresh and sickly scented tuberoses. Callers who came to bid her farewell found that there was a depressing truth in her assertion that Horace was not really dead at all: he was always with her there in the house in the Rue Spontini.

The plans for the burial occupied her mind a great deal, and the faithful Miss Hoskins came in daily to discuss the question. And at length it was settled, in all its details.

She described it to a friend (a Mrs. Blanchard,

[whose

whose acquaintance she had made during her studies in Spiritism).

"I have thought it over," she said in a voice which was known among her friends for its "sweetness." "I have thought it over, and I feel that Horace ought not to be buried on foreign soil. He will rest more quietly in his own homestead in Arkansas. Near our place there—the place where oil was discovered—there is a mountain with a pointed rock at the top. I propose to have the urn," (she made one of those graceful gestures which she had learned at a class in Greek poise, to include the object on the marble-topped table), "I propose to have the urn sealed in that rock, following a little ceremony which I have thought out."

The ceremony, she said, would be conducted by herself—the widow. "Oh," she protested, wiping away a brave tear, "I feel strong enough. It won't be too much for me. I'll do it because I know that it is what Horace would have liked."

There were to be six virgins dressed all in white who would do a dance symbolizing the great question—"O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, thy victory?" She herself would sit a little to one

side, holding the urn, and on placing it in the rock, she planned to read an ode of her own composition, which began, "There is no death; one only steps across."

She had written already to the Members of the Sorosis Club of Poseleta, Arkansas, of which she was still a member, inviting them to attend the ceremony.

On hearing the plan, the fat and cynical Mrs. Throssington, whose somewhat abstract and technical mind Lydia Wimpole had always disliked and distrusted, asked with an air of innocence, "But where can you find six virgins who can dance? And how can you make certain that they are virgins?"

It was a question which Mrs. Wimpole dismissed with a snort.

Two weeks after the service at the house in the Rue Spontini, passengers of the *Paris* found in their midst a large, rather florid woman who dressed always in white and wore a long white veil which floated behind her as she walked. She seemed to spend most of her time on deck, going round and round tirelessly: weather had no effect upon her. She appeared even on days when none but excellent sailors could raise their heads from their pillows.

THE URN

She was conspicuous even among the usual collection of curiosities included in the passenger list of a transatlantic liner, and gradually it became known that she was Lydia Wimpole, widow of an Arkansas oil magnate, and that she wore white in place of the conventional widow's weeds. She was, the more interested came to learn, a devotee of everything occult, and was preparing to present to the world a new faith—an eclectic religion which she explained would be the Esperanto of religions.

They also learned that she was traveling with the ashes of the deceased Horace Wimpole, which she carried in a special traveling case made for the purpose, of purple leather embossed in gold with the esoteric symbols of three religions.

In the large outside cabin of Mrs. Wimpole the urn occupied a prominent place among the flowers and boxes of bonbons sent to the steamer by admirers and disciples. Indeed, it bore an absurd resemblance to one more box of bonbons in a cabin which had the air of belonging to a prominent music hall actress.

On the night of the fifth day out the widow was seized in the middle of the night by an in-

tense conviction that someone—some spirit—was in communication with her, asking her to remove the lid of the urn. Afterward, in recounting the experience to the faithful Miss Hoskins, she said, "I felt suddenly that I was in the presence of a dazzling light and out of the center of it came a voice which I seemed to recognize as that of Horace. Sitting up in my berth, I heard it say, 'You have shut me in! You have suffocated me! Let me be free!' And then suddenly the light disappeared and I found myself sitting upright in the dark cabin, conscious that I had just participated in a marvelous experience. So I rose, and unscrewing the lid of the urn, left the ashes open to fresh and beautiful sea air. I have never heard the voice, nor seen the light, from that day to this."

But there was a part of the experience which she neglected to relate: indeed, it was a secret shared, strangely enough, only by the gaunt, red-faced Norman stewardess who took care of her cabin. This woman was a realistic creature, whose whole mind and soul were wrapt up in keeping her row of cabins in perfect order, so that she might thus earn large tips and hasten her retirement from a sea-faring life to open a café at Hesdin. She

worked mildly and thoroughly, absorbed by that single passion which blotted out even her fatal tendency toward seasickness.

So, on the morning following the remarkable revelation which came to Mrs. Wimpole, she set to work as usual in the cabin, making the dust fly, putting fresh water on the withered tributes of Mrs. Wimpole's admirers, throwing out of the porthole fruits that had gone bad, emptying cigarette ashes. . . . By eleven she had finished her work, and by the time Mrs. Wimpole, in a cloud of white veils, descended, the cabin was all in beautiful order, the flowers were neatly arranged, the clothes hung where they should be, the berth neatly made up. Only one thing was changed. The urn, the sacred urn, embossed with the mystic symbols of three religions, had been moved, irreverently moved! It stood on the shelf above the washstand!

Mrs. Wimpole, who was by nature never very nice to servants, grew red with anger. Crossing the cabin, she took down the sacred urn. One glance was enough to convey the whole of the horrible truth.

The urn was empty!

In her fury she rang all the bells at once, but fortunately none responded but the gaunt stewardess. She faced the wild Mrs. Wimpole (her veils all awry, and her lovely serenity all vanished) with a dumb look of astonishment.

Brandishing the urn at the stricken stewardess, Mrs. Wimpole cried, "What have you done, you stupid fool! What have you done!"

And the stewardess, judging from the violence of the gestures and the article which Mrs. Wimpole held heroically aloft that her agitation was concerned with the urn, replied, "Madame, I simply emptied the cigarette ashes out of the port-hole!!"

"You fool! You idiot! That was my husband!"

She threatened the stewardess with dismissal, with imprisonment. She would sue the Company. She was still making wild threats when the stewardess, suddenly aware that she had for three days been handing about a corpse, fled in superstitious horror down the corridor.

For two hours Mrs. Wimpole lay more dead than alive on the berth, and at the end of that time when she arose she had recovered the sweet serenity which she had displayed at the funeral. She

again summoned the terrified stewardess, and this time she appeared calm and beautiful.

"You must not be afraid, my good woman," she said. "If you keep silent, I shall not hold you responsible. It was an accident. Only never mention the subject to anyone." And she sped the bewildered stewardess two voyages nearer her ambition to retire by pressing a thousand franc note graciously into her red and bony hand.

When the door was closed again, Mrs. Wimpole screwed the lid carefully back on the urn, and placed it once more among the bonbons and withered flowers.

It was this part of the story which she never told, even to the faithful Miss Hoskins.

Six weeks after the lamentable accident, the newspapers of the Middle West and South printed the story of Horace Wimpole's burial. They referred to Horace as a man who had acquired great wealth through the discovery of oil on his land in Arkansas. With his wife he had lived in Paris for several years, but like a good American he had chosen Arkansas as his final resting-place. His ashes, contained in an urn designed by his widow, were placed in the niche of a rock in the highest

part of the Ozarks during the course of an impressive ceremony, at which his wife (dressed all in white) stood by and read an ode of her own composition. As she read, six virgins (only the Southern press, either through modesty or an unwarranted cynicism, referred to them as young girls), also dressed in spotless white, executed a "dance pantomime" on the theme "O Death, where is thy sting?"

A little later, pictures of the ceremony appeared in the illustrated dailies and in the news reels of motion picture houses. The news reel bore the title, "Arkansas widow plans and carries out novel burial service for her late spouse. Mrs. Horace Wimpole reads ode at final resting-place of husband, while young girls dance to the music of Mendelssohn's Spring Song." And then on the screen appeared the ample figure of Lydia Wimpole, clad in flowing white robes, a wreath of tuberoses pressed low over her grey hair above the noseglasses. In one hand she held the parchment scroll from which she read the "ode" beginning, "There is no death: one only steps across."

In the background leapt the figures of six virgins who had learned dancing from Henrietta Eda Mc-

Closkey, teacher of Greek Poise in Little Rock. It finished with the final gesture of the widow placing the empty urn in the niche.

And when sufficient time had been allowed for the news and pictures to percolate through the country, it was announced that a female Messiah had appeared bringing a new religion. The Messiah, Lydia Wimpole by name, had of course set up headquarters in California.

It was all a great success, and no one knew, of course, save the widow and a Norman ex-stewardess, now mistress of a buvette at Hesdin, that Horace Wimpole had escaped at last somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. And no one, not even the widow or the ex-stewardess, ever knew whether or not Horace Wimpole had really appeared in a blaze of light in midatlantic, crying out, "You have shut me in! You have suffocated me! Let me be free!"

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· VII ·

A BAVARIAN IDYLL

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

A BAVARIAN IDYLL

THE little town lay under the edge of the mountain, so that darkness came quickly after sunset, like the dropping of a black curtain. You felt at once a curious awe for the place. In the mud and water of the flat valley, grey and cold and dripping in the chill light of the first December evening, the tall trees were black with veils of blue mist clinging to them. The ancient crooked houses pressed down upon you. There was a faint sound of a distant bell and a smell of the decay from the manure-heaps. The Witch's Sabath and the Bald Mountain were not far from the place.

A BAVARIAN IDYLL

You arrived at last, with the command of "Halt!" in a sort of square set around by overhanging houses, now quite dark, where each door and window sheltered a grey and hostile face lost in the purple shadows. We were the Enemy arriving in conquered territory, but the word "enemy" could not have meant much to those brutish faces that peered out at us. This hostility was more profound than the quick hysterical hostility engendered by war. It was a thing shared by the very trees, the cattle, the dark houses, and the wild ruined castle that stood against the sky above the village. It was an old world filled with all the spectres of antiquity, and into the midst of it came Percy Willets.

He was not more than eighteen and he came from Texas. His father went from county to county exhorting men, women and children to deny the Devil and come to God. Percy was big, and fresh-colored, with great big wrists and ankles. But he was the kind of boy that women take to at once. I saw it happening month after month in shattered villages, barrack towns and cheap cafés. He had a kind of hopeless appeal for hard, loose women. I think it was because he seemed so com-

pletely fresh and virginal and yet so tingling with animal vigor. He was all that a weary strumpet desires in a man. He stood six feet three in his big, bare feet, and he had red hair, and wrists like rifle-stocks that were covered with freckles and bristling, short, red hair. His skin, where it was not burned red by exposure, was white as milk. His eyes were blue and candid and childish.

Percy believed the Bible passionately. He believed every word of it. He believed it so defiantly that he would fight anyone who disputed it, and no one desired to fight him, for Percy, although his mind was slow, had the strength of the ox. He meant one day to be an Evangelist himself.

If he had been a sensitive man he would have suffered, for the others in the Company gave him no peace. They attacked him blasphemously; they mocked the Bible and all his passionate beliefs. After months of it, he gave up losing his temper. He would only scowl, regarding them, stubborn and puzzled, with his head lowered like that of a bull being baited by dogs. He never quite understood what it was all about.

There was in Percy a curious, soft, sentimental

spot that centered about the word "women." He believed that really there were no bad women—and maybe he was right and the rest of us were wrong. Bad women were only creatures like his mother and his sister who had been unfortunate and been seduced and gone astray. He stuck to this belief with all the stubbornness of his nature, in the face of the jeers and mockery of men who knew best the women of barrooms and brothels, soldiers who had no faith in any woman. They tormented him (I know, because he confessed it to me after what happened in Andlau) with nightmare tales of horrible vices and depravities, related solely for the cruel pleasure of watching Percy suffer, as if someone had cut him with a knife, and to hear him cry out, "It isn't true! It isn't true! There aren't any such things! You're a bunch of hogs! You're a bunch of dirty liars!" For really all that Percy had in the world was his Bible, and the curious blinding faith in the fundamental beauty and goodness of women.

Percy had never heard of Walpurgis Nacht or the incubi born of these black northern forests, and so when he found himself that night in the dismal, forgotten town on the edge of the Black

Forest he was only depressed and homesick. He could not explain it to himself. He had no literary or romantic compensations.

He looked so sick and so miserable that I suggested that the two of us take a turn through the dark, crooked streets before falling into a sodden slumber on the damp straw of our billet above the geese and oxen.

We walked in silence over the filthy cobblestones, past one or two drinking-places lighted by dim oil-lights, past crooked, tottering houses, among shadows cast by a moon that hid itself from time to time among the cold clouds. We passed fellow-soldiers who hailed us, bored men who were already silently wandering down the narrow streets toward the wet fields with some girl who might be a vampire or an incubus. And he couldn't speak at all. He was caught in one of those terrible brooding spells when the sin of the world, of all those blasphemous comrades of the Company, of all the horrible, revolting stories they had poured over his head, rose up and engulfed him. He would brood thus sometimes for hours. It was a habit that grew on him. There were times when I thought he was going crazy.

A BAVARIAN IDYLL

We came after a little time to the end of the village, and we would have turned back then save that a little further up the road, set apart from the others, stood a house with brilliantly lighted windows. A sudden ray of moonlight enveloped it. At the same time, the faint creaking of a mill-wheel reached our ears. Silently, without even speaking of it, we both turned once more and continued on our way past the house.

It stood on the edge of the road, very white and clean in comparison with the village, and it was lighted by the brilliant glare of electricity. Over the door hung a branch of pine tree. It was a drinking-place. We passed it again on the second night without going in. But on the third the dreariness of the sinister town grew unendurable. We went in silently without knocking.

2

The brilliant glare of the room struck you first —there was a swift impression of polished glasses, of mirrors, of white, garish lights. It was a pretentious drinking-place in that God-forsaken village. The mirrors were bordered with garlands of

holly, for Christmas was a week away, and bunches of mistletoe hung from the ceiling with a wilted, discouraged air. In one corner sat three sullen farmers, hard, knotty men with beady eyes, who looked at us with that same sullen hostility which hung like a pall over the village.

And then behind the screen of holly you discovered suddenly the proprietress herself, seated on a kind of throne, knitting. She came forward to greet us with a professional air, but the light in her eye was born, too, of something more profound than any mere interest in business. She was *really* glad to see us.

She was a fantastic creature of perhaps forty-five, though she may have been younger, with a lined and ravaged face all painted and powdered so thickly that the stuff had caked and cracked.

She wore a kind of shirtwaist of silk much ornamented with lace, the color of pink which sets the teeth on edge, and a black skirt, cut to fit her neatly about the hips with a wide flare about a pair of silk-clad knees. It was very short. Her black hair was arranged intricately and with great care, and it had been dyed so heavily and so often that it had shades of purple in it, like the wing

of a blackbird. On it was perched a sort of mop-cap, made of lace and poison-green silk. And on her feet she wore, not the muddy sabots of the slatternly peasant woman, but a ridiculous and fancy pair of cheap, high-heeled shoes of patent-leather.

She was—you knew it on sight—a superannuated strumpet. We never saw her in any other costume. I believe that they buried her in it, which perhaps was the fitting thing to do.

It was her eyes which somehow saved her. They were blue (her hair must once have been blonde) and they were young. It was as if, in the wretched and washed-out body, youth survived only in the eyes. There was something tragic and touching in those fine eyes set in a face so old, so battered, and so vicious. You saw her somehow in a short, worn ballet skirt sewn with sequins, coming out when the Madame clapped her hands and said, "Company, girls,"—coming and standing in line, hoping to be chosen by some drunken brutish soldier out of the back streets of a dreary garrison town.

She came toward us tottering painfully on the silly high heels. She must have had rheumatism,

caught in the damps of that forgotten German valley.

"Good eefening!" she said, with a rich German accent. "You are Americans, not so? Welcome!"

From that first moment she made it clear that she did not belong here in this sodden community, that she had nothing to do with its manure-heaps, its crooked streets, its overhanging houses, and its foul smells. She had nothing to do even with those stupid, hostile peasants who sat in the corner.

There was nothing to drink save a white and vicious liquid that went by the all-encompassing name of "Schnapps," and nasty coffee made from roasted acorns. Percy, who had never even tasted alcohol, took the "coffee."

The woman served us herself, and joined us at our table. She tossed her battered hair, shrugged her shoulders in a broken and professional coquetry. The young eyes turned green and brilliant with excitement.

She told us that she was called "Madame Rau," and that she had cousins in America. They were butchers in Kansas City. She had lived in Eng-

[England

land—yes, in London,—that was where she learned English.

The queer, half-comic accent was Cockney. She had no sense of what it was proper to say in English. She said "Goddam" over and over again with a brilliant smile, as if she were using some charming word. She said much worse things, that are not easy to repeat, as if she were discussing the weather. She grew feverish with excitement. She knew only the English of brothels.

No one entered the place, and all the while the sullen farmers watched us and grunted and grumbled among themselves.

She talked, and talked, pouring out tale after tale with the passionate eagerness of one who had not talked in years. Percy's blue eyes seldom left her face. When, with a complete innocence, she used some vile word, he winced as if someone had stuck a knife into him. He had never before talked to a woman like this. He had always run away from them. I knew that he was thinking in his sentimental way that this creature was a woman, too, like his mother and his sister who banged out revival hymns on a tinny piano while his father exhorted Texan farmers to give up the Devil

and follow the Lord. He had a way, when tormented, of pulling his big, knotty fingers until the joints cracked, and he did it now over and over again.

Before we left, Madame Rau (more, I thought, as a ruse to hold us than for any other reason) went over to the gramophone that stood in one corner, raised a gigantic tin horn painted to imitate a morning-glory, and set the thing to making frightful, scratchy music. She played waltzes from "The Dollar Princess" and "The Merry Widow" and other operettas whose gaiety seemed to melt away into nothing in the hard, garish room.

And then, without any climax, the evening came to an end.

The woman begged us to return every night. When we left, she stood in the doorway, silhouetted against the hard, white mirrors and light, until we had stumbled away out of sight through the chill winter fog.

When I think of her, it is always like that, standing in the brilliant doorway, looking after us as we disappeared into the fog.

We did not see Heinrich that first night.

3

All the way home through the dark, crooked streets, Percy stumbled along silently. Once I said, with the hard voice of one who had been a soldier too long, "She's as fine an example of a worn-out tart as I've ever seen."

He turned quickly, almost savagely. "I don't see why you have to talk of her like that. She's been good to us."

So I said nothing more. I knew that Percy was like his father in far-off Texas. He saw only what he *wanted* to see. He was homesick tonight, and that always made him worse.

Once during the night I was wakened by the bites of fleas in the straw, and, half-asleep, I heard Percy tossing and muttering to himself.

The next night I suggested that we go to Madame Rau's. But Percy refused abruptly, and went off alone into the cold forest. I knew what he was doing. He was wrestling with the problem of Madame Rau. The second night he refused, and the third, and then suddenly, inexpli-

cably, he came to me and said, "Will you go with me to that Madame Rau's?"

It was on this second visit that we saw Heinrich. Madame Rau opened the door to us. You knew that she had heard our footsteps on the wet road. You knew that she had been listening for three days and three nights for the friendly sound of our hobnailed boots. Again the room was harsh with cold, brilliant light, and again it was empty save for the three sullen farmers, who sat in the corner watching, watching, watching . . .

Again we sat in the corner by the porzellanofen, only this time Madame Rau did not serve us. She was playing the lady. She clapped her hands. The sound brought to the door of the kitchen a creature whom she addressed as Heinrich. He was clumsy, with great splay hands and feet, and a face covered with pimples. He had stooped shoulders and bulging muscles. Straw-colored hair, ill-cut and shaggy like a sheep-dog's, hung over his low forehead into his eyes. His head drooped and when he looked at us it was with a curious, upward glance through the thatch of yellow hair. It was only then that you saw what he was—the china-blue eyes were the eyes of an idiot.

He shuffled about silently in enormous sheepskin slippers. Their shagginess increased the impression that you were being served by some sort of oaf or troll, by something kidnapped out of the gloomy, mist-hung forests that pressed so close upon the village.

His enormous, hairy hands poured the liquor and Percy's coffee with a strange, professional skill. When he was gone again, Madame Rau began to talk in that same passionate way in her broken Cockney accent. I did not talk much. I yielded place to Percy, who, it seemed, wanted earnestly to talk.

He was still homesick, and uneasy in that God-forsaken world. He wanted to talk about Texas, and the tents and the camp-meetings and his father who saved people, and his mother who led the singing with a cornet, and his sister who banged out revival tunes on the piano. He talked on and on, passionately, his blue eyes growing brighter and brighter, with the look of a fanatic. The woman listened, interested, I suppose, because she had never heard anything like the tale he was telling her, and because whatever the fantastic boy did or

said had a fascination for her. Oh, that was apparent from the first.

Presently he turned from direct description to a sort of subtle exhortation. He began to picture the delights of the Evangelist life and the hysterical joys of Heaven. He sounded unconvincing, and a little like the Book of Revelations. It was fantastic and unreal talk, a little insane and wholly unrelated to life. That was why he had returned. He wanted to talk to her.

When he had quieted a little, Madame Rau reached over and touched his big, raw, hard hand. "It is very naice—all dat—" she said, "and all vonderful." I thought for a moment she had been caught up by his queer, emotional fire.

She clapped her hands, and again the oaf appeared out of the kitchen. And then a really terrible thing happened. The oaf stumbled in the sheepskin slippers and the "Schnapps" bottle fell on the red-tiled floor with a crash. For a second there was a silence, and then Madame Rau turned on him. In the ugly dialect of the valley, she abused him, shaking her fist in fury, and screaming. There was something terrifying in the scene. The hatred which lay beneath it was a

hatred impossible to describe. It was black and obscene, too nauseous to think about. The oaf knelt and dumbly gathered up the wreckage. He accepted all the tirade without a single upward glance. When he had finished, he brought another bottle and served us with the stolidity of a sheep.

Madame Rau made no excuses. She said, "Ach! If you knew vat I had to put up with in this hole! But vat can you do?"

She hated this village, she said, and it hated her. She was not born there. She had only lived there for four years, because—because, well (here she grew a bit vague) a friend gave her this little piece of land with its vineyards and little mill. One could live on it, she said, and the farmers had to use the mill whether they hated her or not. Her own business (she was again vague) had failed like all else in the war, and she had to go somewhere simply to keep alive. In the country there was food, at least of a sort. In the cities there was only misery.

I saw that she was playing the lady again. She was trying heroically to impress us. I think she knew that I couldn't be taken in. But she knew that Percy was being impressed. And she was trying to be what he wanted to believe she was.

She said, "They hate me in the village. They are scared of me because I come from the outside world. They watch me from behind doors and stone walls. When I go into the street, there are always eyes watching me. I can feel them." She leaned toward us across the table and said in a low voice, "Those three farmers over there—they aren't customers. They are a committee sent to watch me. They come here every night and I can't chase them out. And sometimes they make me . . ."

But she did not finish that sentence.

"The women," she said, "are worse than the men." It was as if she were some strange animal caught and placed in a pen. As she said, what could she do? Where could she go? She had tried to sell the place. Nobody wanted to buy it. In the cities of Germany people were dying of starvation. This tiny piece of land was all she had. I knew why her business had failed. An old, battered, tragic thing like that couldn't ply her trade any longer. There was nothing left—nothing but the fine, passionate, young eyes.

They hated her in the village because they were afraid she might corrupt them in some way.

["Tonight,"

"Tonight," she was saying, "you must stay after they have gone, and have supper with me. You must go away and they'll go too. And then you must come back and I'll let you in."

I wanted to go to bed, but Percy wouldn't let me. He had become hysterical. He wanted to rise and throw the committee out into the muddy road. What right had they to treat a woman thus? All the nostalgia, the taste for Evangelism, the sentimentality of Texas wastes, where women, whatever they might be, were in theory objects of chivalry, rose and swept over him. He got up to attack the committee of farmers with his great, raw-boned fists. He pushed me aside.

It was Madame Rau who restrained him. She said it would only make things worse for her when he was gone.

Somehow he saw the sense of what she said. When he had grown a little more calm he said, "Come, Spike. We'll go, and when those bastards have gone away, we'll come back."

So we paid our count and left.

Outside the fog had turned into a fine, cold rain, and we sought shelter in a shed from which we could watch the door. Percy didn't say anything.

I think he was still so excited that he couldn't speak coherently. He just kept muttering to himself, and clenching the big red fists. The Schnapps had begun to go to my head a little, so that I didn't even mind standing in the mud beneath that shed. All at once, I began to laugh, quietly and to myself. The sight of raw-boned Percy, his big red wrists hanging out of the sleeves of his ill-fitting army tunic, muttering and swearing vengeance, seemed funny. "It's me," I thought, "playing Sancho Panza."

In a little while the three farmers came out. They muttered together in their ugly dialect, and passed close by us, and were swallowed up in the cold rain. The oaf, Heinrich, emerged to close the shutters. When all was black we came out again, and knocked three times, as arranged with her.

She had been busy while we were gone. On the table stood a bowl of onion soup and a roast hare. The departure of the committee cleaned the air a bit. Madame Rau tottered about on her silly high heels, and presently we all sat down. Then, strangely enough, the oaf took his place at one end of the table. He ate like a pig, never looking up from his plate, but giving us a sidelong,

suspicious glance from time to time out of the tiny, china-blue idiot's eyes. We grew merrier and merrier, and at last Madame Rau set the horrible gramophone to scratching once more and invited Percy to dance. He didn't, of course, know anything about dancing. The oaf retired to the corner by the porzellanofen to bake his feet, watching us still in the same unhealthy way.

Because I was a little drunk and the whole affair seemed comic and fantastic, I rose and offered myself as a partner. She danced well, despite her rheumatism, despite the ridiculous heels, and we did polkas and mazurkas beneath the suspicious eye of the idiot and the disapproving one of the chivalrous Percy. At last, when Madame Rau was entirely breathless, I thought a touch of gallantry would warm the poor, battered old thing. Some devil prompted me to kiss the withered, painted cheek.

In a second there was a crash of glass and the sound of an overturned chair. A figure sprang between us, and struck Madame Rau across the shoulders. It was not Percy—it was the idiot.

He poured out upon her a stream of dialect. She did not defend herself. Percy seized the idiot

by the arms and held him pinioned. I could have done nothing against the strength of the splay hands and great shoulders. But Percy was stronger than the idiot.

And Madame Rau? She fell to the floor and began to weep in a fit of hysteria. I induced her to get up and sit in a chair, but her wild crying did not stop. Her black hair hung over her face. She buried her head in her arms, and at last she cried out, "Go 'way! Go 'way!" and ran out of the room.

In the silence, Percy freed the oaf, who went back to his corner, picked up his chair, and, regarding us with a silly, hostile grin, again put his big splay feet into the porzellanofen. Somehow he had made fools of the two of us. We stood there in the silent room in the hard glare of light and mirrors awkward and stupid. We did not quite know what to do.

"Come on," I said. "Let's clear out."

I don't think Percy ever understood what had happened, even when he found himself tramping through the mud in the cold rain. He wasn't very bright, and he couldn't even conceive what lay behind the whole scene.

["We'd

"We'd better stay away from that place," I said. "We're only mixing in something that's none of our business, and we'll find ourselves in a mess. This damned village and everything in it isn't worth it."

He halted abruptly and looked at me. "You can't desert that poor woman now. You can't let her alone with those farmers—and that brute. She's been so kind to us—she's had a hard time. She's got a soul."

"Well," said I, "I'm never going into that unhealthy place again. I know when I'm well out of a thing. You can do as you damned please."

He didn't even answer me. He just thought me a coward, a cynic, and a brute, to desert a woman like that in distress.

I couldn't tell him the truth. He wouldn't have believed it, anyway. I couldn't say that anybody who wasn't a fool could see that Madame Rau was living with the idiot who baked his feet in the porzellanofen—the idiot whom those farmers had let her have for a servant because they thought he was so silly that no one could corrupt him.

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I never entered the little white house again, but Percy did. The rest of the story came to me from his own lips between sobs and cries, for in the end he went completely to pieces and wept like a woman. He looked so silly, with his red hair all rumpled and his gawky wrists sticking out of the khaki sleeves, crying like a baby.

It seems that he went back again and again, every night, to sit there with Heinrich and the three farmers, talking, talking to Madame Rau. Sometimes, he said, he didn't talk at all, but just sat there, and once or twice, when he looked up he caught her watching him. He didn't know why, of course. I don't think that in the end he ever understood what happened. He only felt that in some way it was his fault.

In the daytime he prayed sometimes in secret that he might save her. He even had some fantastic plan of having her, a redeemed woman, a Magdalen, return with him to Texas as a sort of exhibit in the Baptist tent show put on by his old man. He told me that she listened to him and

seemed to show signs of repentance and of embracing the Lamb.

In the Company his secret finally came out, and they went about saying, "Have you heard how Percy has fallen? It's that pious kind that is the worst. He spends every night with that broken-down street-walker on the edge of the village."

The jeers, the opposition, the mockery, only made him the more determined.

I guessed what was happening. In a last flare-up of worn, exhausted desire, the woman was falling in love with him. He was all that she was not. He was young, pure, innocent and attractive, in his yokel Baptist way. He had faith in life, where there was none left for her. He had faith even in a creature like her. I think it was that which touched her—the knowledge that there was a man in all the world who didn't feel contempt and repulsion for her. Because you couldn't properly count the idiot as a man. . . .

She wanted to show Percy how she felt. She wanted to do something in return, and there wasn't anything she could do, or anything she could give, except herself. Love with her had been

a business—it was the only way she knew how to repay him.

Every night he went away, and waited in the shed to return after the farmers had gone away. He stayed sometimes until long after midnight, talking to her, while the oaf sat baking his feet in the porzellanofen. She gave up the gramophone and broke the disks. She even knelt and prayed with him. All the while the idiot watched them out of his pig-like eyes.

And then, before Percy's job of conversion was quite finished, there came an order for the Company to move on. He went on the last night to bid her good-by, to pray for the last time. Somehow she got rid of the idiot, Heinrich. No one ever quite knew what she did, but Percy found her alone. The oaf didn't even appear after the farmers had gone.

She had a special supper for him, and brought out a lot of letters and telegrams, and while they ate she told him her story, or at least one of them. She said she had been seduced by an elderly butcher, who rid himself of her, and gave her the piece of land in Andlau. There must have been something in the desertion part of the story, because the let-

ters and telegrams were found afterward strewn about the floor. When she had finished her story, she began to show him, in all the coarse, age-old ways of her profession, that she loved him, that she meant to give him the only thing that she had to give.

At first, Percy didn't know what she was trying to do, and when slowly it dawned on him, it made him sick. He told me that he wanted to go outside and throw up, because the woman was horrible and repulsive to him, and the look in her eye disgusting. And then she did something which he wouldn't tell me. But whatever it was, it made him sort of crazy. And with all this, he knew, too, that he had failed. He thought that Madame Rau had been making game of him all along. I could never wring from him all that she did and said, but whatever it was, she made him know that all the horrible stories they told in the regiment were true.

He ran out of the inn and down the road. When he had gone, there was nothing left for her. She hadn't even her gramophone and her scratchy waltzes out of "The Dollar Princess" and "The

Merry Widow." She had even destroyed those. She had tried everything.

Long afterward he did tell me one thing. It was this. As he got up to run away she caught him by the sleeve, and she said to him (he said it was a kind of whisper), "Will you kiss me good-by?"

He hesitated, and she said, with such fierce intensity, "You *must* do that, you *must* do that," that he couldn't refuse.

He tried to kiss the poor old wreck, and leaned down to her. She moved to kiss him, but at the last moment his courage failed him. Disgust got the better of him. He turned away and her painted lips touched only the rough khaki of his shoulder.

He ran then, but before he was out of hearing, he heard her cry out, "You couldn't even do that!"

It was the last word he heard her speak.

Before it was dawn the Company, starting in the grey fog, was all up, ready to depart. Percy was there beside me, all white and haggard. He couldn't talk. He just stared into the fog. And as we waited the order to march, a commotion arose suddenly in the crowded street. The suspicious peasants who were out to see the enemy leaving, suddenly grew wild with excitement. The uproar

jumped from group to group. One of our men, who spoke German, asked an old man standing against the wall beside him what it was all about.

He repeated the question, and I heard the name of Madame Rau. Then he turned to us, and said, "It's a murder. That old harlot who had the inn by the hill cut her servant's throat, and killed herself. They found them just now."

Beside me the great, clumsy body of Percy slipped into the mud.

It was when he came to that he told me the story. We stayed behind, four of us and an officer, until the sorry mess was cleared up. There was no doubt about it. The woman had cut her servant's throat and then her own. There was only one point that was not clear. It couldn't be settled whether she had killed the idiot before Percy came to the inn or after he had gone away.

Percy never understood what had happened, and I couldn't very well say that if he hadn't gone again to the inn the crime would never have happened. I couldn't tell him that in a way he was the murderer of them both.

A BAVARIAN IDYLL

6

Last summer I was in Texas, and the town was plastered with signs announcing the presence of the great Evangelist, the Reverend Percy Willets, better known as the Doughboy Devil Chaser. There was a meeting that night for men only.

I went. The canvas tabernacle was packed. A man (the sister was apparently not hardened to men's viciousness) banged out dreary revival tunes on the piano. There was a hush, and the Reverend Percy Willets rose to his feet. It was the same Percy, stupid, unaltered, save that the doughboy uniform was gone, and in its place an undertaker's suit of black decorated the ungainly form. He raised the great, hairy, red hands. There was a hush, and he dropped them again.

Then he began in a low, theatrical voice. It was almost a whisper, "When I was younger, in the days of my black sin, before I was bathed in the blood of the Lord, I caused a woman to commit murder and suicide. . . . "

Then he waited for a moment until this had impressed his hearers sufficiently.

[Oh,

(Oh, yes. Percy had grown up and learned a trade. He wasn't a fool any longer.)

I heard him impressively repeating the phrase a little louder, "When I was younger, in my days of black sin, before I was bathed in the blood of the Lord, I caused a woman to commit murder and suicide. . . . "

He was a success—Percy. He knew what he was doing. He knew how to get an effect. That opening sentence went big. He was letting all the other folks know that one of the boys had found the light. He knew now that there were women like that and it didn't seem to upset him much.

It had all happened ten years ago.

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· VIII ·

NIGEL

A Purely English Story

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

NIGEL
A Purely English Story

AS I returned from the morning walk through the pine forest, prescribed by the doctor, I found the other four occupants of the Grand Wilhelmina Hotel and Sanatorium in the bright little garden. It was off season and the corridors of the establishment echoed and re-echoed with each voice, each shout, each whisper. The sound of your heels on the bare wooden floors rattled and reverberated. The curtains were down and the carpets up, all being cleaned, scrubbed and sprinkled with strong-smelling German disinfectant by the grim proprietress, Frau Bockländer.

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In the garden three of the five patrons of Frau Bockländer's establishment were seated about a table at the far terrace, having their morning *tilleul*. These were Professor Potts, Mrs. Winterbottom and her companion, Miss Wadleigh-Nipham. The fourth patron beside myself—Mr. Jones by name—was engaged as usual in exercising his pair of white poodles upon the other terrace which overhung the old town just above the spire of the Frauenkirche. He always exercised the dogs, as he did everything else, at exactly the same hour. The poodles were, I think, the center of all his emotions; indeed, of his entire existence, for he displayed no interest whatever in humanity. No one else was allowed to keep dogs at the Grand Wilhelmina Hotel and Sanatorium. Frau Bockländer permitted Mr. Jones to keep dogs only because he had lived in the establishment in season and out since the days when Frau Bockländer's mother-in-law was the reigning proprietress. That was more than thirty years ago.

Although we outnumbered Mr. Jones four to one, it was not he who was the pariah of the Grand Wilhelmina. We were the pariahs. He had cast us out. By some means this small, pot-bellied,

bald little man made us feel vulgar and inferior. Aside from a grudging "Good morning" which he flung at us once a day, he addressed no word to any of us. Sometimes he held a conversation with Frau Bockländer. So I had been cast without choice into the company of the Professor, Mrs. Winterbottom and her companion.

The presence of Mr. Jones caused the two ladies a great deal of unhappiness, simply because they could find out nothing about him. Even Frau Bockländer knew nothing save that he had come there thirty years ago and that he lived on an income. He was unmistakably English; neither Scotch, Irish nor Welsh, but English. Mrs. Winterbottom had long ago pumped Frau Bockländer more than dry of all information without discovering a single detail regarding the family, the property, the politics, or the love life of Mr. Jones. Simply because one could discover nothing about him, this plain, stupid little man remained a glamorous subject of mystery and false speculation. Miss Wadleigh-Nipham had the most romantic theories. She thought that he might have committed a murder or that at least he was the sinister offspring of some member of the Royal House.

As I approached the table of the other three pariahs, I heard Professor Potts say calmly, "He knew the table was Gladys because it came and sat on his lap!"

At least they were not comparing symptoms. Their sense of relationship to each other was subtle. Mrs. Winterbottom was the widow of a Birmingham manufacturer of drain tiles, in which career he had, she said, made a tidy fortune. She was an endless knitter, beginning one garment as soon as another was completed, and like most endless knitters she was an endless talker. She was nonconformist and talked a good deal of money. Miss Wadleigh-Nipham was the daughter of a Church of England clergyman from Hampshire. She was aged vaguely about fifty, wore her thin hair in an elaborate and fuzzy pompadour, peered through steel-rimmed spectacles, and had a hairy mole on her chin. When not engaged in reading aloud to Mrs. Winterbottom so that that lady need not interrupt her knitting, Miss Wadleigh-Nipham indulged her interest in spiritualism and water-colors. She was very refined. The professor was a retired schoolmaster, and all that you might suppose a retired schoolmaster to be, but like many English

at the passing of middle age he had developed a single violent eccentricity. This was, in the case of Professor Potts, a beard in which he took great pride. It was rich, dyed and perfumed. I think he wore it as a symbol of his release from the dreary lot of a schoolmaster. He flaunted it. It was always Professor Potts' beard which entered the room first. With Miss Wadleigh-Nipham it was always the hairy mole, and with Mrs. Winterbottom always the capacious bosom. Owing perhaps to the Professor's long experience with the pure abstractions of higher mathematics, he had acquired a naive and scarcely creditable gullibility regarding all worldly things. You had only to tell him some grotesque theory to have him not only believe it, but set out at once to convert you to your own belief. Although he talked a great deal he was not a conversationalist. With him all talk became a sort of public address, a habit, I suppose, developed through long contact with school-boys.

Mrs. Winterbottom was of vulgar origin, but rich. Miss Wadleigh-Nipham was poor, but the daughter of a clergyman and an obscure cousin of a Hampshire county family called Nipham-

Tokes, to which she was constantly referring upon the slightest excuse. The professor was of nondescript origin and only moderately well off, but was regarded as intellectual. Totalling their various debits and credits, I think the three of them came to a mutual and unspoken understanding that socially they were equals. All, perhaps, except Miss Wadleigh-Nipham. There were moments when I think she felt herself superior to the other two. Whenever Mrs. Winterbottom sensed this feeling, she would, in order to restore her own self-respect and to put Miss Wadleigh-Nipham in her place, order her companion to find a book and read aloud to her.

I think they were all a little upset by me. As a journalist who did not speak with a Cockney accent, they found me puzzling. I fitted in none of those pigeonholes which have for so long kept the British Empire stable and in good order and which causes English strikers, despite themselves, to bring their children to witness the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace. I troubled them. I was not ticketed and labeled.

I joined the group, ordered my *tilleul*, and asked, "What on earth are you talking about?"

Mrs. Winterbottom answered me. "Professor Potts has just been telling us of his brother's remarkable experiences with spiritualist mediums."

"Mrs. Potts," said Miss Wadleigh-Nipham, "Gladys, if I may use her Christian name—was the wife of Professor Potts' brother. She was dead, of course, at the time of the communications."

"She had been dead for some ten years," explained the Professor, "when she saw fit to communicate with my brother."

"Professor Potts' brother only died himself last winter," footnoted Mrs. Winterbottom.

"He hopes to get into communication with him," said Miss Wadleigh-Nipham. "It is one of the most extraordinary experiences that have come my way."

So he knew the table was Gladys because it came and sat on his lap.

The professor seemed lost in his memories of the experience, and Mrs. Winterbottom observed, "Mr. Jones' throat seems to be better."

"I notice he's taken off his woolly," said Miss Wadleigh-Nipham. "I think it's always bad to take a woolly off your throat at this season. I mean when you're used to it."

[Mrs. Winterbottom

Mrs. Winterbottom knitted two and purled three. "Perhaps," she said, "you ought to speak to him. A man like that alone with no one to look after him!"

The suggestion fell upon thin air and perished unheeded. It was in its intentions nothing more than a move in the game that went on perpetually among us. The object of this game was to force one of us into the position of opening a conversation with Mr. Jones. None of us, and certainly not myself, had either the courage or the intention of approaching Mr. Jones and beginning a conversation. He had developed the power of repelling you to an amazing degree. Even the passionate, devouring curiosity of Mrs. Winterbottom had never driven her to the attack. Now she was playing upon Miss Wadleigh-Nipham's interest in operations, illnesses, affections and afflictions. But the companion only allowed the remark to die.

I was aware, too, that these three understood that the desiccated, mysterious Mr. Jones was a gentleman and that this disturbed them. We knew that he was an English gentleman because he was so rude and uncivil; for among us, unlike other

civilized races, bad manners are prized and even acquired at great pains as a sign of distinction.

Suddenly I saw Miss Wadleigh-Nipham poke Mrs. Winterbottom violently and exclaim in a stage-whisper, "There she goes now!" and I became aware that our little colony at the Grand Wilhelmina had been increased by one.

Going down the path was the most extraordinary woman. In the nineteenth century she would certainly have been called a "female." She was colossally fat and moved painfully, as if her feet were too small for her great weight. She was dressed in a black suit with a voluminous skirt and a pink satin shirtwaist trimmed with gold lace. On her head she wore what could only be described as a confection. It was of red plush and adorned with flowers and plumes. Over it, she wore, flung back over her shoulders with an abandoned air of a voluptuous and impatient bride, a long purple veil. She was obviously Spanish or Italian and possessed that greasiness of complexion which is only possible among Latin peoples. She passed us with a sound of clanking which emanated from masses of barbaric imitation jewelry which adorned her neck, wrists, ears and fingers.

["Who

"Who is she?" I asked.

Professor Potts answered me. "It is Madame Venturini, the distinguished medium."

She had arrived last night, explained Mrs. Winterbottom, and although she was not English it appeared that, like the rest of us, she suffered from a liver. This knowledge Mrs. Winterbottom had already garnered from Frau Bockländer.

So it was the arrival of Madame Venturini which had led up to the extraordinary remark about Gladys and the table.

Madame Venturini sailed heavily out of the gate on her way to the famous and unique spring of Eckenbaden. The clock in the Frauenkirche struck ten and Mr. Jones led the poodles into the back garden where they passed their days. As I have said, he did everything on schedule. Returning, he went down the neat gravel path recently trod by the majestic step of Madame Venturini. He was not bound for the unique and famous spring, for although he had lived in Eckenbaden for thirty years and was English, he had no liver. He was bound to fetch his *Morning Post* which arrived every day by the ten-thirteen train from Coblentz. The *Morning Post* was another thing

which helped to widen the great chasm between Mr. Jones and Mrs. Winterbottom. If it had been the *Daily Mail* that he went each day to fetch, she would, I think, have forced a conversation.

Miss Wadleigh-Nipham blew her nose (it was always slightly red at the tip from a habit she had of blowing it whenever she ran out of small talk). With her free hand she produced a book which she had been concealing, somewhat shamefacedly, I thought, in her lap. It was a thick volume bound in the ugly durable fashion of the late nineteenth century. In heavy gold letters appeared a title which sounded rather like that of a bad romantic novel of the same period. It was called "Nigel."

Then I saw the name of the author and remembered. I had read it myself years ago when desperate for something to read. I discovered it in the drawer of a dressing-table in a pine-front hotel in the far reaches of Saskatchewan. The author was Hilary Passamore, Duke of Wintringham. I understood why Miss Wadleigh-Nipham handled it with so much awe. Its presence there on the table among the empty *tilleul* cups and bits of *küchen* raised the whole tone of the party.

"Now that he's gone," said Mrs. Winterbottom

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in the voice of a conspirator, "Esme can read it to us."

"The book belongs to Mr. Jones," explained Esme, or Miss Wadleigh-Nipham. "And he doesn't know we have it. I induced Frau Bockländer to pretend she wanted to read it. I just happened to see it one day when I was passing his door. He was out and his door happened to be open. So when Madame Venturini arrived . . . "

"He doesn't know who Madame Venturini really is," interrupted Mrs. Winterbottom. "Frau Bockländer says he has a horror of mediums."

"It's the only book he has," observed Miss Wadleigh-Nipham, who most certainly had been snooping, "except the Bible and a full edition of Lord Byron."

"Let us begin reading," said Professor Potts in a voice that reproved us for having fallen into chit-chat. "When Miss Wadleigh-Nipham has tired, I will take it up."

Although Miss Wadleigh-Nipham passed many hours each day in reading aloud, she was, I knew, tireless. She even took a pleasure in reading aloud. She read with "expression" and always identified herself, I felt, with the youngest and most rav-

ishing creature in the book. Except for her water-colors, for which Mrs. Winterbottom allowed her very little time, reading was the only outlet of what was a strongly emotional nature.

She began to read, but Mrs. Winterbottom, who was no disciple of the literature of escape and allowed no book to carry her away from the more fascinating details of life, interrupted her. "We thought," she said, "that when Madame Venturini felt more herself, we might induce her to hold a séance. Professor Potts thought it would be nice to communicate with his brother. He was always such a profound believer."

Many people have read "Nigel," and there are doubtless many even today, like the little group on the terrace, who once regarded it as a Bible. There are even people, no doubt, who still believe it passionately despite all that happened afterward. It is not a romance, or at least not a romance in the accepted sense. "Nigel" is the history of communications held between the Duke of Wintringham and his dead son.

The part being read by Miss Wadleigh-Nipham was what is commonly called "introductory material." It described in much detail Wintringham

Abbey, Wintringham House in Hyde Park Terrace, and Uggleuch Castle, the ducal seat in Scotland. While Miss Wadleigh-Nipham read, the little boy Nigel grew into adolescence, went to Eton and at length into the army. From time to time, Miss Wadleigh-Nipham interrupted her reading long enough to pass the book about in order that we might see the illustrations. There were pictures of Nigel in kilts, aged four, at Uggleuch Castle, of Nigel, aged seven, on his pony before the stables of Wintringham Abbey, Nigel at twelve with a cricket bat, Nigel at fifteen in an Eton topper and, at length, Nigel as a young man in the uniform of the Guards. There were, too, many engaging open-throated Byronic photographs of Nigel in, as it were, *deshabille*.

Then, in the rich voice she employed while reading, Miss Wadleigh-Nipham gave us several anecdotes of what Nigel had said or done as a child. These were written in the fashion of a doting mamma recounting what little Evelyn had said to Nanny when he refused to eat his porridge. It would all have been hopelessly sentimental and in bad taste but for its obvious sincerity and its touching earnestness. For once in his life the Duke,

whom I knew only as a vain and testy old man, had stripped himself of all vanity. He had loved this boy. That much was quite clear.

And then I made a fatal error. I chanced to murmur that Wintringham Abbey was one of the finest places in England, and Mrs. Winterbottom, who missed nothing, forced me breathlessly to admit that I had stayed there three times. At once I was aware of a change of attitude toward me. I was placed. I had visited a Duke, the very Duke who had written this book. I was no longer simply a journalist who did not speak with a Cockney accent.

I admitted that I had seen pictures of Nigel that were not in the book and that I had even seen Nigel's pony, which at the time I visited the Abbey had attained the remarkable age of thirty-one years. The book was forgotten while Mrs. Winterbottom pumped details from me as water from a well.

I told them that for forty years the Duke had been known as a vain and crochetty old Tory whose only weakness was his passion for séances and mediums. There were always mediums coming and going from Wintringham Abbey and

Wintringham House. I had myself encountered them together with the famous Wintringham ghost (who was an old lady in an Elizabethan ruff) wandering through the chill corridors of the great house—greasy, untidy women rather like Madame Venturini. The Duke went furtively to table-tippings in Bloomsbury, Hammersmith and Bayswater. He put up his own guineas to defend foreign ladies arrested for fraud, and became head and principal financial support of the Spiritualist Society. He had whole collections of photographs of fairies, and others of fat women in trances from whose open mouths streamed strange figures in ectoplasm. He wrote eagerly articles on spiritualism for the cheaper newspapers, which were eagerly accepted and printed because he was a Duke and which would have been as eagerly rejected if he had been a clerk. Every spiritualist was invited to stay at Wintringham Abbey. I even knew of unscrupulous people who became converted to spiritualism in order to get an invitation to stay at the Abbey and so to better their social careers.

But of course "Nigel" was his *meisterwerk.*

The old Duke, I imagined, must be at least ninety-five by now.

Miss Wadleigh-Nipham resumed the reading; and, watching Mrs. Winterbottom, I decided from her expression that she was growing impatient for the portion devoted to the death and funeral of Nigel and the grief of his relatives.

We were now treated to a description of Nigel's exploits. He was a youth of much physical beauty (to judge from his pictures) and, according to the Duke (who implied the knowledge as discreetly as possible), not only possessed an irresistible attraction for the ladies, but also a willingness to concede to their desires, and so became entangled with many feminine admirers. He was, of course, as the Duke pointed out quite frankly, one of the great catches of England, less perhaps because of his personal attractions than because of seven titles and three hundred thousand a year which would be his upon succession.

I fancy Miss Wadleigh-Nipham found this portion of the book singularly moving, for her voice grew deeper and deeper and began to tremble. Perhaps it was only the excitement of coming

upon so romantic a figure as Nigel in a book supposedly devoted only to ghosts.

Then we reached the chapter headed, somewhat inappropriately, considering the earlier hints regarding the amorous dallyings of the hero, "Young Galahad sets out upon his Quest."

The Quest was in the direction of Bessarabia. Nigel involved himself as a volunteer in the army of Bessarabians engaged in one of their periodic revolts against their masters the Turks. At this point I began to suspect the sincerity of Nigel. He was following the career of Lord Byron too closely to escape the suspicion of plagiarism. It seemed to me that a good poseur might have thought up something more original. The open throats and flowing locks of Nigel were too good to be true.

But Miss Wadleigh-Nipham had no such base suspicions. Lowering the book for an instant, she regarded me with damp eyes and remarked in a voice quite different from the one she used in reading, "What a wonderful young man he must have been! It's a pity young men aren't like that any longer. But ideals have changed so since his day."

She raised the book to resume the reading when Mrs. Winterbottom said in a stage-whisper, "There he is now, come back!" The book vanished quickly in Miss Wadleigh-Nipham's lap.

Through the gate, bearing his *Morning Post,* came Mr. Jones. He passed us without any sign of being aware of our presence, without turning to see his purloined book clutched between the hysterical knees of Miss Wadleigh-Nipham, without noting the flushed and guilty expression on her thin face.

"We can read again tonight in the drawing-room when he has gone to bed," said Mrs. Winterbottom, who felt that calamity and death were approaching rapidly. "It's too bad. It was just beginning to be interesting."

So that day we read no more.

An hour later, Heinrich, the porter, appeared bearing Mrs. Winterbottom's *Daily Mail,* and no sooner had Miss Wadleigh-Nipham opened it to read aloud to Mrs. Winterbottom than I heard a cry of astonishment. Sitting on the far end of the terrace I was engaged in writing to a maiden aunt from whom one day I expect a legacy. I heard Miss Wadleigh-Nipham cry out, "Do come

here, Mr. Evans! The most extraordinary thing has happened!"

Impatiently, I went over. Miss Wadleigh-Nipham, who was a perfect companion, allowed Mrs. Winterbottom the pleasure of breaking the news. "*He* is dead," she said breathlessly.

"Who?"

"The Duke of Wintringham."

"Well," I said, "there is nothing astonishing in that. He must have been at least ninety-five."

"But don't you see?" asked Miss Wadleigh-Nipham.

"See what?"

"It's like an omen—I mean his dying like that just while we were reading 'Nigel'!"

"Evidently," I said, "he must have died some time before we began reading 'Nigel.' The *Daily Mail* has had time to be printed and sent all the way to Eckenbaden since his death."

"But it's all the same," said Mrs. Winterbottom firmly. "It's like he died at the same time." She made a clucking noise. "And with Madame Venturini right here in the same hotel! It seems like Providence."

I still refused to admit finding in this chain of circumstances evidence of the workings of Fate.

In his schoolmaster's voice, Professor Potts said, "We must certainly arrange the séance as soon as possible. I will speak to Frau Bockländer about it today at lunch. It may be that we have been chosen by his Grace as the instruments of his communication. Tomorrow night would be a very good time."

Miss Wadleigh-Nipham began to read aloud the *Daily Mail's* account of the Duke's demise. "Duke of Wintringham's Death" ran the streamer. "Amazing Stories of Spirit Communication."

His Grace, it appeared, had passed away at Wintringham Abbey from the infirmities of old age, to be succeeded by his heir, the Viscount Passamore who, it would be remembered, had married the actress, Miss Mazie Dare, some twenty years earlier, a match known as one of the happiest in the long annals of the many alliances which had taken place between the stage and the aristocracy. A son, Nigel Passamore, had died gallantly some thirty years before the death of the late Duke, as a volunteer on the side of the Bessarabians during their heroic revolt against the Turks. The late

Duke had been the author of a celebrated book dealing with a series of communications claimed to have been received from this son after death. On his own deathbed the old Duke had promised to return and communicate with believers in Spiritualism.

"To think that it's this very book!" murmured Mrs. Winterbottom, as if none of us had fully realized it until now.

Miss Wadleigh-Nipham was still reading as I turned and went away to finish my correspondence. Crossing the garden, I was forced to step aside in order to let pass Madame Venturini, who was returning from her morning draught of the waters of Eckenbaden. She swept past me in a clanking of jewelry and she left in her trail a fog of cheap rouge, perspiration and patchouli.

2

If I were Miss Wadleigh-Nipham I would doubtless begin this portion of the story thus, "How shall I attempt to describe the tumult of events during the past two days? How shall one humble inadequate pen record the emotions and the ex-

citement which has set this quiet corner of the world by its ears?" The style of Miss Wadleigh-Nipham is perhaps overheated and too intense.

Suffice it to say that on the evening of the same day, after Mr. Jones had retired, I went to the drawing-room, where I found my three companions in the adventure of Nigel already huddled about the fire. Miss Wadleigh-Nipham was reading in that voice which she dedicated to reading. As they glanced up I saw in the three pairs of eyes the reflection of a new respect, and then I remembered that I had once visited a Duke.

They had already reached that portion of the story for which Mrs. Winterbottom had been waiting with such morbid impatience. Miss Wadleigh-Nipham was reading of Nigel's gallantry and death. He had extinguished single-handed the flames of a burning Bessarabian village and had rescued from worse than death fourteen Bessarabian women of various ages, when he was struck down by a Turkish bullet. A Bessarabian comrade, well shielded by a heavy stone wall, saw him fall, but in order to save his own life and to complete the partially abortive rescue of the fourteen peasant women from worse than death, he was

himself forced to flee and to leave Nigel dying in the middle of the village street. He had, however, just time to catch Nigel's dying words. They were, "Go! Leave me and save the wretched women! What is my life compared to their virtue?"

So the women had been bustled off by the comrade. None ever saw Nigel again and none knew where his body lay buried.

At this point Miss Wadleigh-Nipham's voice, which had been mounting like a rocket in a blaze of elocutionary splendor, gave way altogether. She was forced to remove her spectacles and dry her eyes. Mrs. Winterbottom stopped knitting. I think that she was a little disappointed that so little space had been devoted to the grief and suffering of Nigel's relatives.

"A truly noble young man," murmured Professor Potts in a hollow voice. "It makes me think of what the great Duke of Wellington once said."

"What was that?" asked Mrs. Winterbottom.

Professor Potts straightened himself in his chair and said in his deepest voice (the one he must have

used on class days), "Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton."

As a sort of training for the séance which Frau Bockländer had managed since lunch to arrange with Madame Venturini for the following evening, we finished reading "Nigel" that night. What remained of the book concerned itself with the communications from the Nigel of the other world. These came in a variety of manners, some in dreams, some by way of ouija-boards, some were messages brought by the fairies, and some came through mediums at Wintringham Abbey or in darkened rooms in Bloomsbury, Hammersmith and Bayswater. For several of the communications Madame Venturini had been responsible.

Here Professor Potts interrupted to explain that the Madame Venturini mentioned in the book was the mother of the one staying at the Grand Wilhelmina Hotel and Sanatorium. The gift of clairvoyance, he pointed out, was frequently inherited.

The reading was resumed and as I listened I could not but think that the person or persons responsible for the communications, whether he or they were the Duke himself, the mediums, the

fairies, or Nigel, showed a singular lack of originality and inventiveness in the account of the next world. After his heroic death in Bessarabia Nigel had, he said, simply passed over the border into a world which was almost the same as the one he had quit under such heroic circumstances. In this new world they had newspapers, sardines, gramophones, sofa-cushions and automobiles. The principal difference appeared to be that in the new country pins did not prick, knives did not draw blood, automobiles did not run into pillar boxes, and there were no ptomaine poisoning and no livers and hence no such watering-places as Eckenbaden (a thing which I was beginning to think for the first time would be a pity). On the other hand, although there was no bodily pain, neither did there seem to be any bodily pleasure, for there were lusts neither of flesh nor of appetite. The change, I confess, seemed to me scarcely worth making. Nevertheless Nigel, who had been somewhat of a Don Juan in this world, appeared to be entirely happy and at ease in the next.

It would all have been ludicrous and absurd save for the naive and genuine grief of the old Duke at his son's death and for the obvious happiness

which he drew from the "communications." In both there was an element which commanded respect. The old man was so sincere and so proud and so earnest that you could not in good taste scoff at the comfort he drew from such ladies as the mother of the heavily perfumed Madame Venturini. As Miss Wadleigh-Nipham read on, we no longer interrupted her. Even Mrs. Winterbottom grew quiet and forgot to knit and purl. We arrived at the last line. "*And so,*" it read, "*I feel that we have never lost Nigel and that one day—a day which I sometimes await with impatience—we shall meet again in a new and better world. I know that Nigel is awaiting his father.*"

Miss Wadleigh-Nipham closed the book and Professor Potts said, in a deep voice, "That is a meeting which I should like to witness. It may be taking place even now."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Winterbottom, "Madame Venturini can get us a message from Nigel himself."

"I am sure," I said, "that she will be able to get us messages from anyone we care to hear from."

I slept badly that night. I was troubled with

strange dreams in which ectoplasm seemed to be issuing from the mouth of the sleeping Professor Potts. Miss Wadleigh-Nipham and Mrs. Winterbottom, clad in native Bessarabian costume, seemed to be among the unfortunate Bessarabian ladies being saved willingly or unwillingly from worse than death. I was awakened early in the morning when the threads of my dreams became entangled with the threads of reality. As I opened my eyes I realized that lusty screams which had nothing to do with nightmare, were being rocketed into the air somewhere near at hand. They appeared, indeed, to come from just beneath my window. Rising and looking out, I saw what can only be described as an ejection.

On the neat gravel path Madame Venturini was engaged in hand-to-hand combat with Heinrich, the stalwart porter. The object of the battle appeared to be a Gladstone bag belonging to the celebrated medium. Outside the gate on the roadway, in a neat pile, stood the remainder of Madame Venturini's gawdy luggage which resembled in its variety and color the baggage of a departing troupe of animal trainers. In the midst of the combat Madame Venturini kept screaming in-

sults in bad German at Frau Bockländer, who stood silent in the doorway with her arms grimly folded. Opposite me on the other side of the court, the figures of Mrs. Winterbottom and Miss Wadleigh-Nipham appeared, chastely hidden all save the heads behind the chintz curtains. A little lower down the rich purple beard of Professor Potts jutted over the window-sill.

In the end it was Heinrich who won the struggle. Wresting the Gladstone bag from Madame Venturini, he ran down the path and placed it outside the gate atop the remainder of her luggage, and when the celebrated medium waddled after him to seize it and return to the hotel, he craftily locked the gate, shutting her outside. She stood there shaking her fist and screaming imprecations through the iron bars.

After breakfast there was a second flurry of excitement. Two strangers arrived to stay at the Grand Wilhelmina. They were men—clearly important men. One had the air of a solicitor and carried a dispatch-case. The other was a gentleman of about fifty with a red face, large white mustaches, and the air of a congenial rip. Both had very little luggage. Mrs. Winterbottom dis-

covered them in low-voiced conversation with Frau Bockländer, but was unable to pry any information from the proprietress. In her excitement over this mystery she even forgot for the moment Madame Venturini.

It was only when I met my three fellow-pensioners at the famous spring of Eckenbaden that I learned the story of Madame Venturini's dramatic exit. Mrs. Winterbottom had discovered all. The whole thing, she said, was the fault of the ill-tempered Mr. Jones. She was indignant and puffed and blew a good deal during the recital of Madame Venturini's wrongs. Mr. Jones, it appeared, had a discerning eye and suspected at once the profession of Madame Venturini. When Frau Bockländer admitted that the foreign woman *was* a medium, Mr. Jones flew into a tantrum. He jumped up and down and behaved in a manner altogether out of keeping with his previous behavior. He could not abide mediums. He would not even stay under the same roof with one. Frau Bockländer could take her choice. Either Madame Venturini must leave the Grand Wilhelmina Hotel and Sanatorium or he would leave it. And Frau Bockländer, being a good business woman, chose

to keep Mr. Jones, who had occupied a whole suite for thirty years (indeed had she not inherited him from her mother-in-law?) to Madame Venturini, who occupied but one shabby room and was only a temporary boarder. "So Frau Bockländer," said Mrs. Winterbottom breathlessly, "told Madame Venturini that she was cleaning and redecorating the entire establishment and that Madame Venturini would have to find rooms elsewhere." But the medium grew suspicious and refused to go. Thus had occurred the scandalous scene of which all of us were witnesses.

The plans for the séance had of course been disrupted. If we were to communicate with Nigel, the Duke and Professor Potts' brother or Gladys, Madame Venturini, who in the interim had had her luggage removed with dignity, would have to be found somewhere in the town. Professor Potts volunteered to undertake this mission and I left them to set out for the morning walk through the pine forest.

When I returned, it was clear that new stories had invaded the Grand Wilhelmina. True, Mr. Jones was exercising his poodles as usual, but with him, walking up and down the terrace above the

Frauenkirche was one of the strangers—the one with the red face and white mustaches and the air of a congenial old rip. And on the other terrace sat Mrs. Winterbottom. She was in distress. She was not knitting and Miss Wadleigh-Nipham held a bottle of smelling-salts under her nose. Professor Potts regarded the tableau with sympathy, although I did see him cast a single malignant glance at Mr. Jones. He made some remark which I was not near enough to hear.

But as I approached, Miss Wadleigh-Nipham gave me a look and said, "The most awful thing has happened!"

Mrs. Winterbottom recovered her senses sufficiently to break the news herself. "That," she said, pointing to Mr. Jones and gasping a little, "*that* is Nigel. He was never dead at all!"

3

The rest of the story has long since become public property and you have doubtless read and forgotten it. Mrs. Winterbottom and Miss Wadleigh-Nipham will never forget it and they will, I think, never forgive "Mr. Jones." It was as if

he had planned a deception of thirty years' standing simply to upset their dignity. Even when I pointed out to them that "Mr. Jones" was no longer "Mr. Jones," but the sixth Duke of Wintringham they were not impressed. He had hurt them too deeply by his colossal deception.

The truth was that Nigel had never died at all. He had been captured by the Turks, but he had lost his memory and for four years he remained lost to the world that had known him. Wandering now here, now there in the Levant, he had managed to live somehow, a poor romantic gentleman with dimmed wits. And then one morning in a café in Athens he had picked up an English newspaper to read that the Duke of Wintringham had come to Greece on a mission for the government. And slowly he began to remember, not only Wintringham Abbey and Uggleuch Castle, but that his name was Nigel Passamore and that he was none other than the heir of the Duke of Wintringham. He was, it seemed, not quite certain even then that he was in his proper senses and he said nothing to anyone but went direct to the Grand Metropole Hotel in search of the Duke. He met him in the corridor of the

hotel as the Duke was coming from the bathroom clad only in a flannel dressing-gown. At sight of him the Duke very nearly had a fit of apoplexy, and when he had recovered a little he then thought that Nigel was only a materialization. But when there was no doubt as to the solidity of Nigel's flesh and bones, he claimed loudly that Nigel was a fraud. It must have seemed to Nigel that his father wished him dead and was determined to have him so. But there remained one piece of evidence. Nigel tore open his shirt and showed his father the birth-mark that was unmistakable proof. Then the Duke locked the door of his bedroom, collapsed and told Nigel the whole truth.

He told him that he had written a book called "Nigel" which had caused a great sensation and was being read everywhere—in England, in America, in India, in South Africa, in Canada, in Australia. People had come to him in hundreds seeking comfort and enlightenment upon the subject of spiritualism. The book had advanced the cause more than any amount of money or education. In the terror that struck at the Duke's colossal vanity, the father wept. What, he asked, was he to

do? If Nigel appeared now, his father would be a laughing-stock before the whole world.

They talked for hours while the Duke kept a whole train of Greek officials waiting outside the door, and at last they reached a decision. Nigel was to return to Europe but not to England and he was to remain in hiding until they planned a course of action. The Duke knew a good place to hide. It was in the Black Forest and was called Eckenbaden. Before they parted, Nigel asked for a copy of the famous book, and the Duke, who always traveled with several dozen copies to give away to acquaintances and those interested in spiritualism, gave it to him.

Nigel went to Eckenbaden and a whole year passed. The Byronic fire had been burned out in the Bessarabian adventure and in the sufferings afterward and he seemed content to rest for a time in obscurity. And then, too, he had read "Nigel" and he felt, after reading it, that he, too, might be the laughing-stock of Europe if he reappeared. There was something ludicrous in having died publicly a heroic death and in having communicated from the other world, only to reappear safe and sound. And so a second year

passed and a third and he began to grow accustomed to being dead. He even came in a way to enjoy it. And the Duke came presently almost to believe that his son was really dead and to take up once more his interest in spiritualism. It had been somewhat dashed for a time. And in the end, the father and son came to a silent agreement. Nigel was to remain dead so long as the Duke was alive.

I had these details from Nigel's cousin, Margaret Nickleham.

And then at last after thirty years the Duke died, and Mrs. Winterbottom, Miss Wadleigh-Nipham and Professor Potts found they had been cruelly deceived.

The man with the dispatch-case was the Wintringham family solicitor, and the fast-looking gentleman with the red face was the brother who had married Miss Mazie Dare of the Gaiety. Together it took them two days to persuade "Mr. Jones" to return to life, but at last they succeeded. The Duke of Wintringham, accompanied by his brother and his solicitor and his two poodles, left on the third day for England.

Professor Potts had discovered Madame Ven-

turini in a hotel in the town and made all the arrangements for a séance. But it never took place. The three of them had not the face to go through with it. In order to save their dignity with the scented medium they told her they were called back to England, and left before their cures were finished; so it ended by my being left alone with Frau Bockländer in the vast and echoing Grand Wilhelmina Hotel and Sanatorium.

4

When I came back the following year I feared that I should again pass the four weeks in solitude. But Frau Bockländer cheered me by saying that my old friends were returning. There had been a slight change. They were returning as Professor and *Mrs.* Potts and Miss Wadleigh-Nipham. I received the news with thanks and turned toward the garden. The clock in the Frauenkirche was striking ten, and there on the terrace above the town appeared what could only be a phantom. It was "Mr. Jones" walking up and down with his two poodles.

[I turned

I turned to Frau Bockländer. "But you didn't tell me the Duke of Wintringham was here."

"It's not the Duke of Wintringham," she said, looking at me sharply. "It's Mr. Jones. He's come back to stay."

And then I understood. He had been dead too long. He couldn't bear returning to life.

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· IX ·

JUSTICE

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

JUSTICE

THE specks of dust danced in the long sunbeams that fell across the dim courtroom. The judge cleared his throat. He was a lean man, bald and with a not unkindly face, but impersonal, too intellectual, too calloused.

"The case of the People against Michael Rooney!"

The shuffling among the spectators died away. The clerk, a tired old man with long, drooping mustaches, fumbled among his papers, rattling a little, as if he, too, were desiccated and dusty. The district attorney, handsome, Jewish, urbane, in-

[intelligent,

telligent, sat down by a table to run his pencil through the copy of the indictment. His manner spoke for him: "One among so many. I've forgotten the circumstances of this one." He was a little bored, a little weary. He was not in the least interested in sending Michael Rooney off to prison.

Below us—the twelve good men and true—sat the defendant Michael Rooney and his attorney.

"Gentlemen," continued the judge, in his polite, incisive, colorless voice. "The defendant Michael Rooney is charged with grand larceny in the first degree. The case should not require much time. It is a simple one. The evidence is simple. There are no complications. The defendant Michael Rooney is charged with having acted as lookout during the robbery of one Patrick Love on the night of June 24." The judge rustled the papers before him. "He was indicted jointly with one Willie Fallon, who has already pleaded guilty to the charge of grand larceny in the first degree."

Feet shuffled nervously. The district attorney rose languidly. You liked him. He inspired confidence, a sense of impartiality. He addressed the jury.

Did any of us know him or the attorney for the defendant? Did any of us feel in any way prejudiced against himself, or the defendant, or the defendant's attorney? Did we understand that an indictment implied no guilt whatever? That it was simply a means of bringing a charge? We had a moment to answer if we had any answer to make. Silence. The machine rolled over us.

I examined myself. I *was* prejudiced against the attorney for the defendant. I knew this. I could not say so in court. I had never seen him before. There must have been others among the twelve men who felt dimly the same prejudice. The man was repulsive. He sat, like a toad, like a crawling thing you might find under a stone—oily, obsequious, with an air of maddening pomposity. He scratched a miserable existence by being appointed to defend unfortunate men who had no money to pay counsel. He hung about the court waiting for the judge to throw him a bone. A despicable character, whom it was impossible to respect. A shyster lawyer! Lawyers were bad enough, with all their tricks, but a shyster lawyer!

Did we understand that an indictment implied

no guilt whatever? That it was simply a means of bringing a charge?

I understood that. No doubt the other eleven did. Yet? In the back of my mind, in some region beyond my control, a little voice kept saying. "There must be something in it. A jury believed enough of the story to bring a charge. It can't be false altogether." I instructed that portion of my mind to be still. It would not be still.

I am, I suppose, a man of average intelligence, but I could not still the voice. About me in the jury box were men less intelligent, men whose minds were little better than those of children, men whose minds were full of prejudices, of racial hatred, of a thousand bitter, twisted convictions. How many of them were like that? Who could say? Some of them certainly were. To some of them, that little voice must be shouting.

The attorney for the defendant began the same set of questions. Again a slight pause in which to answer. The machine rolled on.

"I am satisfied," the toad told the judge. (I must not feel prejudiced against that man.)

The machine paused for a moment. More

rustling of papers. A consultation. I fell to regarding the defendant Michael Rooney.

He sat with his cap in his hands, his eyes fixed upon a scrap of paper on the table before him. He was an ordinary youth, like a million others. He wore a shabby blue suit, bought on Eighth Avenue, high-waisted and fastened with a single button. His hair was dark, reddish. His hands large, clearly the hands of one who did manual labor. There was nothing unusual about him, save perhaps the breadth of shoulders and the faint swagger they carried.

He raised his head, looking straight at us, and I knew suddenly that there was something different about Michael Rooney. He was not at all like a million others. What was the difference, the distinction? The smouldering light in the blue eyes? The slightly pointed tip of the ears? That indiscernible air of swagger? Impossible to say. Yet the impression was vivid, unmistakable. There was a spark . . . something . . . which only a few men have in this civilized day. Who can say what it was? What marked him? What placed him? A gift of life which only a few men

have? I think it was a sense of wildness and freedom.

On the table before him was a little spot of sunlight.

Amid a rustling of papers the machine was moving again.

"The circumstances of the case are simple," began the prosecuting attorney. "On the night of June 24th, a police officer saw the defendant Michael Rooney and the co-defendant Willie Fallon enter a doorway with one Patrick Love, who, it appeared, had been drinking heavily. A moment later he says he saw the defendant Michael Rooney step out from the hallway into the street and look up and down. Then the officer crossed the street and entered the hallway. He discovered the co-defendant Willie Fallon with one hand in the trousers pocket of the complainant Patrick Love. At his approach, Fallon withdrew his hand and two quarters fell to the floor. The defendant Michael Rooney, so the police officer says, was standing by. As the case progresses you will hear the stories of the various witnesses."

The case progressed.

The complainant, Patrick Love, stepped into the

box. He was a man of perhaps forty, seared, bloated, savage in appearance, resembling a baboon. He was a creature, scarcely a man, unmistakably at the lowest rung of the human ladder. He spoke with an appalling brogue. He did not understand the simplest questions. The questions had to be repeated again and again. The machine terrified him. He had lost his wits.

He was a laborer, he said. He had been in the city about five weeks. Before that he worked in St. Louis. He went where he could find work. Sometimes a strike-breaker. On the day of the robbery he had been to Celtic Park to see the football matches. He had many drinks, so many he couldn't remember the number. At seven in the evening he had gone to the neighborhood of Ninth Avenue and Forty-ninth Street, where he heard there was a dance. No, he never got to the dance. He stopped at a saloon and had more drinks. How many? He did not know. He could remember nothing save that he left the saloon and started up Ninth Avenue. He had in his pocket, he believed, seventeen dollars. No, he wasn't sure, but he remembered changing a twenty-dollar bill sometime during the day. Did he know the defend-

ant Michael Rooney? No. Had he ever seen him before? No. Had he seen him on the night of the robbery? He might have. He couldn't say. He remembered nothing.

The prosecuting attorney questioned and the attorney for the defense protested questions, he asked that they be struck out. The stupidity of the man! Even a layman could see his protests were idiotic. He was a toad trying to halt a steam-roller. The judge, curt, dignified, denied his protests. Each time the shyster spoke people noticed him and that fed his sense of importance. Each time he rose to protest, he was for a second at least the center of attention. (I must not feel prejudiced against the man.)

He, too, questioned the complainant Patrick Love. The story remained the same. He had been robbed, the money taken from his pocket. He did not know how, he did not know when or he did not know where. He was too drunk. The dustman might have swept him up and dumped him into the river with no loss to anyone.

I looked again at the defendant Michael Rooney. Did he know the complainant? Had he robbed him? Who could say? Nothing in his face re-

vealed the truth, or the lack of truth. He sat watching that speck of precious sunlight, crossing the table before him, moving slowly away, slipping down toward one leg of the table. The shoulders remained squared, a little defiant in the face of the machine.

Police officer Redmond stepped into the box. Red-faced, hair *en brousse* like the comb of a fighting-cock. Turned-up nose. Pale blue eyes. Awkward manner in the face of the machine. He told his story.

It followed closely the outline of the district attorney. He had found in the pockets of the defendant Rooney and the co-defendant Fallon the total sum of one dollar and sixty-five cents. Together it was all they had. No, they could not have taken more than that amount from the complainant Patrick Love. It was all they had, both of them, together. He was certain of the identity of the defendant Rooney and the co-defendant Fallon. He saw them enter the hallway with the complainant Love between them. Yes, there were other men standing near the doorway. Three or four, he couldn't be certain. No, he was sure that the defendant Rooney had been implicated. He

wasn't simply standing beside the doorway. The time? The hour was ten minutes to two. "I had just happened to look at my watch. I seen it happen from the opposite side of the avenue."

I watched the face of Michael Rooney. He had forgotten the fleeting sunbeam. He faced police officer Redmond boldly. The light in his Irish eyes flamed a little higher. The shoulders squared more defiantly. Not the proper attitude for a prisoner. No cowering. Too much defiance. More like a leopard shut up behind bars.

The machine moved on.

The defendant Michael Rooney took the stand. With hand on the Bible, he swore the oath that every witness swears and some of them must break, since all cannot tell the truth. He sat down, still twisting the cap in his hand. The light was still in his eye. For a moment it dimmed, but instantly flared up again. He did not cringe. His body did not sag.

Yes. He was arrested at Ninth Avenue and Forty-ninth Street. He was on his way home. He had taken a girl home from a dance and was passing the corner when the officer arrested him. He lived with his sister and brother-in-law. He did

not rob Patrick Love. He had never before seen the co-defendant Willie Fallon. Yes. He lived on the same block with Fallon. He had lived there for five years. And still did not know Fallon, who had already pleaded guilty to the charge? No. Had never seen him until they were arrested together. The name of the girl he was seeing home? Nellie Rand. Where was she now? Why was she not in court? She had moved away. He did not know her new address. He had known her three years. They met on a street-corner. Before she moved away she had lived near the scene of the crime, a block away.

I began to wonder. Nellie Rand! Was she a real person? Was she a woman at all? Was she simply a symbol of all women? Of street-corner encounters? The defendant Michael Rooney had the air of a man who was death to the ladies. A cock among hens . . . that free swagger, that sense of wildness, that light in the eye. A man born to live wildly. A man born free. I began to believe that he was guilty. I also began to believe that it made no difference.

The defendant Michael Rooney stuck to his story. He had not stepped into the street. He

had not aided in the robbery of Patrick Love. He did not know the co-defendant Willie Fallon.

Presently the machine had done with him. He got down and went back to sit beside the toad.

Another pause, more rustling of papers.

I knew the town. I knew the block where Michael Rooney lived. Rows of filthy brick houses, fifteen people living in three rooms. Streets littered with garbage, flying dust and old newspapers. Filth. Sweat. Hardship. Poverty. Five years in that block where men and women, even children, fought simply to live. Oh, yes. I knew it!

The machine was rolling again.

The co-defendant Willie Fallon stepped into the box. He, too, swore to tell the truth, like the complainant Patrick Love, the police officer Redmond, the defendant Michael Rooney. He wore pants of khaki, a blue shirt open at the throat. Tousled brown hair. Blue eyes close together. A long nose. Manner bewildered.

He had been on the corner on the night of the arrest. He had picked the complainant Patrick Love out of the gutter where he was lying in the filth. He couldn't walk, so he dragged him into

the hallway and propped him up on the lower step. He could not remember quite clearly. He had been drinking himself. He did remember loosening Love's collar. He could not remember having robbed Love. He supposed he done it, if the policeman said so.

There was a sudden halt. The polite voice of the judge interrupted the questioning. He said that if Willie Fallon pleaded guilty only because the police officer said he committed the crime, the plea must be changed. A man could not plead guilty unless he knew that he had committed a crime.

"Mr. Clerk, change the plea of the co-defendant Willie Fallon to not guilty."

In the box the co-defendant Willie Fallon sat wooden. Clearly it was all the same to him. He didn't understand any of it. He, too, had a lawyer who made a living by hanging about court.

The questioning began again. No, he did not know the defendant Michael Rooney. Had never seen him up to the night of the arrest. He had lived in the same block, but only a month. He had been out of work for two weeks. He had been out of work off and on ever since he got out of

the army. Why didn't he rejoin? Hell, nothing could get him back into the army. He'd had enough of that. Being knocked around.

"That will do, Mr. Fallon."

The co-defendant Willie Fallon shuffled off, led through a barred runway by a guard.

In his chair, the defendant Michael Rooney sat upright, the cap clutched desperately in his hands. He was looking at the bit of paper. The spot of sunlight was slipping away, gently, easily.

One more witness. Giovanni Sardi. Blacksmith. Character witness. Short, powerful, swarthy, dressed for court in a Palm Beach suit and Panama hat. Very broken in English.

"A blacksmith, you say?" queried the judge with a twinkle.

"Yes . . . blacksmith . . . my card." He handed the judge a card.

"*Wagon repairing*," read the judge to the court. "*Iron work, etc.*" He leaned toward Giovanni Sardi. "You don't shoe horses?"

Sardi grinned. "No shoe horses."

"I'm glad of that. Then you're not a real blacksmith. I'd hate to think of a real blacksmith in a

Palm Beach suit. Spoils the illusion. Spreading chestnut tree . . . all that."

A compensating titter swept the courtroom.

Giovanni Sardi testified that the defendant Michael Rooney worked for him as a helper. Four years ago. Yes. Good fella . . . Good fella . . . Everybody like him. Especially the girls.

The Palm Beach blacksmith, grinning, confused, vanished.

Again a pause. A rustling of papers. The wall was closing in.

The prosecuting attorney and the attorney for the defense dispensed with summing up. Such a simple case. No need for it. The judge turned toward the twelve good men and true. The object of the trial, he said, was to prove the innocence or the guilt of the defendant Michael Rooney. The presumption, in our courts, was that a man was innocent until proven guilty. We must remember that. An indictment meant nothing, no indication of guilt. Our problem was to determine who was telling the truth. Was it probable that the defendant Michael Rooney happened to be on that one corner of all corners at the moment of the crime, to which the co-defendant Willie Fallon

[had

had already pleaded guilty—or, at least, said he must be guilty if the police officer said he was. We must be satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt. The law recognized no degree of guilt. If the defendant Michael Rooney stepped from the doorway to shield and protect the co-defendant Willie Fallon, he was as guilty as if he himself had taken the money from the pocket of the intoxicated complainant Patrick Love. We must remember that. The amount of money charged in the indictment . . . the judge rustled his papers . . . one dollar and sixty-five cents, had nothing to do with the case. The charge was that a man had been held up and robbed in the night-time. That was what made the affair serious. We must not allow the so-called crime wave to influence our judgment. If the defendant Michael Rooney was innocent, he was innocent whether or not there was any crime wave.

He told us a great deal more . . . a list of things we must do or must not do in reaching a judgment. The instructions seemed to carry an inverse meaning . . . as if each one meant exactly the opposite of what the judge intended them to mean. The indictment did carry an implication of guilt. We

must be influenced by the crime wave. It is not clear. I cannot explain it. The speech was gently cynical, ironic—unconsciously so, I have no doubt. He must have said the same things so many times.

And at last, with a great shuffling of feet, we rose and filed out. I saw the eyes of the defendant Michael Rooney following us, wistfully. Again I was thankful I was not in his shoes. He still clutched the cap. The swagger had diminished a little. The spot of glowing sunlight had slipped away, quite to the edge of the table.

The twelve good men and true were shut up in a little room with a barred window at one end. We sat in twelve chairs about a long table. The room was bare. Nothing to distract our minds. Pure justice was our goal.

Silence. A thin, stooped, middle-sized man . . . a clerk, no doubt . . . cleared his throat officiously.

"Let's get the business over. I've work to do. It's the first time I've missed an hour from the office in ten years."

"To begin with," said I, "we might take a vote."

The foreman stood up, plump, goggle-eyed, kindly. "Gentlemen, how do we stand?"

[We

JUSTICE

We stood evenly divided, six for conviction, six for acquittal. I, with five others, remained seated.

One of those standing, a big man with a bull-neck, in a checked suit, glared at me . . . hard as if I were a criminal.

"The fellow's guilty as hell!" he shouted. "Did you see him cringing there in the box? He couldn't look you in the eye. That's the way you can tell . . . every time!"

Michael Rooney had not cringed at all.

Another attacked the six seated jurors. A little man, full of importance, with jowls and a furtive eye. He spoke with a rich accent. I knew the sort. Man of property. Cloak-and-suit business. Worked his way up, by any sort of means.

"It's our duty to act, gentlemen . . . to protect society. No one is more soft-hearted than me. But if we let this fella go there'll only be more hold-ups, more robberies. Think of what the fur trade has lost in loft robberies alone. Something's got to be done. A fella ain't safe to walk a block at night-time. You remember the judge pointed out it was night-time. It's our duty to send this fella away."

I protested. I recalled to them what the judge had said, how he had counselled us to be fair, thoughtful.

One of those seated—a fat, good-natured old fellow—supported me. "It's a serious charge . . . grand larceny in the first degree . . . next to murder. They can give him a stiff sentence . . . five or ten years."

In the back of my mind, a voice kept saying, "He's guilty. You know he's guilty."

A little insignificant man, one of those who had asserted himself for conviction, found an opening. He related a long and complicated story of the perils of the streets at night-time. He worked in the night-time. Every night the policeman on the corner escorted him home because he said it wasn't safe. A lot of fellas like this Rooney runing around loose. You could tell by the way the fella swaggered that he was a bad one. In the box he was defiant. Not at all the proper attitude. What chance had a little fella in the night-time against a guy like Rooney. It was an age-old cry of vengeance, the little fellow against the full-grown man.

The clerk who had not missed an hour from

his office in ten years looked at his watch. He was eager to be back in his chains. To be free made him terrified and nervous.

"We might take another vote," suggested the mild foreman.

This time only two of us remained seated, the irresponsible fat man and myself.

"They haven't proved anything," I persisted, "not a thing. It's pretty hard to send a fellow away on such evidence."

The bull-necked gentleman turned on me savagely. "Ain't you got any intelligence? It's plain as day!"

In his wake the cloak-and-suit business followed in the attack. He was polite, oily. "Just look at that fella's face. Ain't it enough? Maybe some day you'll be robbed, eh. It ain't safe, I tell you. It ain't safe."

In the back of my mind a voice kept saying. "What's the use? If you disagreed there would be another trial. They'd only convict him. Anyway, you know he's guilty." I kept seeing things too. Michael Rooney's block and the kids in it that never escaped until they died.

The anxious clerk interrupted. "That other

fellow . . . Fallon. You heard what he said about the army. A fine way to talk. No patriotism. No cooperation. That's the kind they are."

"You could see Fallon was trying to shield him," added the gentleman in the checked suit. "Anybody could see that. Saying he didn't know Rooney. A lot of bunk!"

The foreman's monotonous voice again. "Gentlemen, we might take another vote."

This time I was deserted by my fat friend. He stood up. They waited. I was the ordinary citizen. Slowly I, too, got to my feet.

The cloak-and-suit business heaved a sigh of relief. "Well, that's done. Gentlemen, I congratulate you. We haff done our duty."

The little man regarded his watch. "It only took us ten minutes," he said. "Maybe the judge wouldn't like such a quick verdict."

"Maybe we'd better wait a little while," said the cloak-and-suit man.

"Sure," said the complacent fat gentleman. "We might enjoy another smoke before going in."

So we sat and smoked and talked of the crime wave for ten more minutes. We had to create

with the judge an impression of our profundity, our deep deliberation.

When we entered, the courtroom was still. We took our places. The roll was called.

"Michael Rooney, face the jury and hear the verdict!"

The defendant Michael Rooney was brought before us. He looked at us squarely. His knees, I think, trembled a little. His face grew a shade more pale. But the light did not go out of his eyes, nor the defiance from his broad shoulders. He turned his cap round and round, awkwardly. Somewhere in the background the attorney for the defense regarded us with an oily smile. He was rubbing his hands all the while. His manner said with oily confidence, "Gentlemen, don't think I'm in sympathy with the prisoner. I'm appointed to defend him. I'm a good honest citizen . . . one of the best!"

"Foreman of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

"Yes, your Honor."

I looked away from Michael Rooney. He seemed to accuse me . . . of what? Of doing my duty. Simply that. Nothing more. Of betray-

ing him to those other men, the nervous clerk, the bully, the insignificant fellow, the cloak-and-suit business—to all the ones who were not what he was and hated him for it.

"Do you find the defendant Michael Rooney guilty or not guilty of grand larceny in the first degree?"

"Your Honor,"—the voice of the foreman trembled a little—"we find him guilty of grand larceny in the first degree."

My eyes, beyond control, sought Michael Rooney. He stared at us with the air of a stoic, as if he did not see us at all. Then, slowly his shoulders drooped. The cap fell to the floor. The light, which had persisted through everything, went suddenly out of his eyes.

We had killed Michael Rooney. The thing which was Michael Rooney, the essence of him, the fire, the freedom, the swagger, the light in his Irish eyes. This we had slain. For stealing . . . if he did steal it . . . one dollar and sixty-five cents from a besotted animal, we had killed a rare thing in an abominable civilized world.

The whole affair was over and finished in an

hour and ten minutes. One must hurry. So many cases.

Five years . . . Ten years! Michael Rooney after that? No, it was better not to think of it, for it was the end of Michael Rooney.

The judge in his polite, incisive voice dismissed us, without comment. I heard Michael Rooney answering his questions. "First conviction . . . Twenty-five years old . . . Parents dead . . . Single . . . "

Twenty-five plus ten . . . Twenty-five plus five. One dollar and sixty-five cents.

The machine began to roll on. "Bertha Fradkin to the bar!"

Curious, I waited for a moment. Bertha Fradkin was a bedraggled woman of perhaps thirty-five, in an ill-fitting tan suit. She had the face and the eyes of a moron. They were sentencing her. I heard that cold, polite voice of the judge, a voice like the voice of a machine.

"Bertha Fradkin, I sentence you to life imprisonment."

There was a curious empty silence and the muffled, sickening sound of a groan and a body

crumpling upon the floor. It was her fourth offense.

I went out of the room. I had served the State and done my duty. I must forget the experience as quickly as possible. Life is too short to brood over things.

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· X ·

THE LETTER OF A ROMANTIC

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

The LETTER *of a* ROMANTIC

Fontainebleau

DEAR ELENOR,

I have not written to you in seven years and I am writing now not because I have anything to say but because the mood is on me.

It is the *triste* season here in Fontainebleau when the palace is empty and the old carp swim like ghosts beneath the carpet of dead leaves on the great pond. The town is empty and you can walk for miles along the *allées* of the forest without seeing a soul or hearing a sound, not even a bird, for there are no birds in the forest of Fontainebleau. It is a Fontainebleau you have never

[seen,

seen, in January, where one goes to be alone for a day or two.

All the afternoon until twilight I have been wandering about the palace with an old guide who has been a friend of mine since I came here as a boy on the grand tour more than forty years ago. He takes me into closed, forgotten, forlorn corners of the palace where others have never penetrated. Somehow it gives the palace a kind of reality for me as if I looked into the past and saw all its ghosts in a way not permitted to others.

The glamour has clung to my damp clothes like the scent of rotting leaves in the forest where Francis the First led all the court to hunt. It has dimmed, even annihilated, all the dreariness of this cold, pretentious, vulgar little hotel salon where I sit writing. The glamour makes me forget all the machine-made chairs and imitation tapestry and factory-turned cornices. It is the salon of a shabby little hotel without any beauty save in its name. They call it the Pavillon Dorée. The Pavillon Dorée. What a lovely name for a place with a room like this!

Let me describe it to you. There is an ornate ebony piano which is hung with ball fringe and

makes atrocious sounds (I have tried it). There are three muddy paintings of the forest in autumn, done, I think, by the proprietor's daughter; and four or five pieces of furniture in the gilt and sateen of Louis Philippe, and on a hideous painted mantelpiece, also adorned with yards of ball fringe, there is a doll dressed as Marguerite at the spinning-wheel covered by a glass dome. The wallpaper was designed by a madman with layer upon layer of funeral wreaths printed in bloody magenta. The very inkstand of imitation bronze is a writhing and twisting monstrosity. I am too old, Elenor, to ignore such a room, but old enough to have the patience to bear it. At least, I am alone here.

Outside in the slow rain there is an old hunting dog who keeps baying and baying as if he saw somewhere far off in the shadows of the encircling forest the ghosts of those other dogs who hunted there four centuries ago. I was thinking today what a sight it must have been with the hounds swarming into the oval court of the palace on their return from a hunt, surrounded in the light of torches by all the glittering court—the torches and the hounds, the color and the glitter and the

sound of metal striking metal as the horses tossed their heads. All this beneath the eyes of the ladies who looked down on the spectacle from the long open gallery. The shadows dancing on the grey and rose walls of the palace. . . .

I am beginning to feel old, Elenor, and more sentimental than ever. I'm having a debauch of romanticism. I don't get on with this new generation. I can see you smiling and saying, "Here is Walter being literary again." Sometimes I think I ought to have been a writer. I'd have enjoyed it. Do you remember when I used to write poetry? In those days Browning and Tennyson were great poets, though I'm told there are some who don't think them great shakes in this day. Nobody writes on great themes any more. They're all small mincing themes full of "pity and irony" . . . as if it were ever difficult to be ironic. Well, times change and the mark of the generation sticks. We're marked when we're young. Still, I can't think that life has changed much. I can't quite believe in all the sordidness and tragedy and sex of these youngsters. In the long run, life is a pretty cheerful affair and most of us come to the end of it easily and happily.

Isn't that so? Your life has been pleasant, and mine. And think of our friends, the boys and girls we grew up with. No, life isn't tragic and bitter, and if it is, why should we go on writing that it is? That's where the romantics are right in making something better than life. Some would say that because I've never had to work and have never married that I've run away from life. At least, it's always been for me a happy, romantic existence.

When I came in from walking in the rainy twilight, I said to myself, "What a pity it is that I haven't someone here who would enjoy all this as I'm enjoying it!" I suppose it's a sign of old age when one begins to like resorts out of season. I thought, "Well, if there is no one here to enjoy it with me, I will write to someone. There is nothing else for me to do in the long evening alone in the Pavillon Dorée." So that's why I have written to you—because I thought that you were the best person in the world to have here with me. And then it occurred to me that it was your birthday.

And now, since I've begun this letter, I find that after all I'm not alone in the hotel. I've just

heard voices. There are two people dining in the room beyond the salon—a man and a woman, and they have brought with them a gramophone. Imagine that! Bringing a gramophone to Fontainebleau in the *triste* season. The thing has begun to scratch and shriek, drowning out the sound of the old hunting dog baying in the rain to the spectral hounds of the forest. It is one of those jazz tunes. I think in Paris they call it, "Yes, sir! That's my baby." How bored they must be with each other to bring a gramophone down to dinner!

And now it's stopped abruptly, cut off in the very midst. The woman, it seems, doesn't fancy the tune. From the sounds, I should say they were our country people, Americans of the sort which gives all of us a bad name outside our own country. The woman has just cried out, "My God! Why must you play that damned thing? You know how my nerves are tonight!"

The man hasn't answered her. He seems to have humored her silently, by changing the disk. They're playing Tosti's "Good-bye." It is wailing away at a frightful rate—

Falling leaves and fading flowers,
Shadows falling on you and me,
etc., etc.

It's strange, but something in the woman's voice made me think suddenly of Isabel; not the sound of it, for her voice was always beautiful and this is the voice of a common woman who drinks too much whisky. It's odd, but this is the second time today that I've thought of Isabel when she's been forgotten for years. Lord! How many years? Fifteen. Twenty. Perhaps more. She may be dead, for all I know. Memory plays strange tricks. This morning at the palace I had a sudden feeling that I had seen her somewhere today quite close at hand, as if she had passed me in the street without my quite recognizing her. It may have been that I passed someone who resembled her. Faces have strange resemblances.

I've just remembered that you're the same age as Isabel, and that this, too, must be her birthday. You used to celebrate on the same day in the old house on Murray Hill.

What has become of her? I remember her as I saw her on the night she ran off with that

fellow Preston. Ah, you were there, too. You must have the same memory of her, though you may have seen her since. I've never seen her, though I heard she was in Peking just before I arrived seven years ago. It's only lately that I've been able to think of her and of how much I was in love with her. Before now it always hurt me too much. That's why I always avoided meeting her. I could never forget her running off with him. It's so long ago now that it all seems quite beautiful and something to be thankful for. It's almost as if she'd joined the procession of ghosts that haunt the old corridors of the palace. She *was* a beauty, with her dark hair and blue eyes and that spoiled, quick, bad-tempered way of her. Ah, Elenor, I was in love with her. She could have had me on any terms.

(They have started the damned scratchy thing again in the next room. I think they must keep the thing going to escape speaking to each other.)

She could have been happy—Isabel, I mean—but she always had to be making a sensation. Perhaps I'm just a prig. Perhaps she *is* happy. She always had to be noticed by people. She might have married Preston decently, but she preferred

to elope with him. And she might have been happy with him, but she preferred a divorce in days when divorces were still sensational. It's odd how the years make you see things differently. I was in love with her once. She was the only woman I've ever loved. But now I can't help thanking God for all the trouble I escaped because she thought me dull . . . how much trouble and notoriety!

What has become of her? The last I heard was when she ran off from her second husband with Murchison, who seemed a sober enough fellow and not the sort to leave a wife and children for a woman of forty. Always a sensation. "The beautiful Isabel so-and-so eloped, etc. . . . " Life, it seems, has never been exciting enough for her.

And now Murchison's life has been ruined and he's lost. I suppose they're together somewhere. He was an honorable sort, as I remember him, and by now she must be too old to indulge in any more escapades. I suppose he's sticking to her for the sake of something that is dead. They were mixed up in some sort of yachting scandal in England about ten years ago. I think that's the last

time she's been in the papers. She must be old and weary of sensations by now.

The music has stopped again in the next room and they've begun to quarrel. Apparently, it's some sort of a rendezvous. Thank God, they're not people that I know! I suppose they think themselves alone in the Pavillon Dorée. I've coughed and dropped a book on the floor—a heavy volume of Saint-Simon—but the woman is in a kind of frenzy and not to be stopped by the mere presence of a stranger. She's screaming at him and he is silent. She's just cried out, "I'll leave you! Why don't you say something instead of sitting there like a deaf mute? I've ruined myself for you and all I've had is misery, misery, misery!" The man answered her, "For God's sake, leave me and stop talking about it! Leave me in peace!" She's gone into hysterics. I think the wretched creature is drunk.

I'm going up to my room. I can't stand it any longer.

An hour later.

I didn't escape. I was gathering up my things when the pair of them came through the room,

moving across it against the pattern of bloody-magenta funeral wreaths. He was carrying a portable gramophone and some disks. I shouldn't have looked up or taken any notice of them, but the man paused and, seeming not in the least put out by what he knew I must have heard, asked me what time it was. He was a tall man, with a lean, weary face and grey hair, with the look of a gentleman. I took out my watch and silently held the face of it toward him, and as I did so I noticed that the woman had halted in the doorway to see why he had not followed her. You could see at once why she had stopped there on the threshold. She was afraid that he might escape from her.

She was a tall woman, with a figure that once must have been fine before she had grown heavy with dissipation. She had a sagging chin and that hard, worried look of a woman who had clung desperately to her youth. The ravaged face was painted, crudely, as if she had done it while intoxicated, and her hair was of that dyed, unreal shade of mahogany-red. I should have turned away, but there was something about her that arrested me. She stood drawn up unsteadily against

the doorway, with a wild and grotesque dignity, as if she were commanding me. Clearly she was thinking, "Look at me. You are a man. You will seldom see such another beauty . . . " as if she had never understood that she was nothing any longer but a raddled shrew. And then all at once I was sick, really sick, Elenor. There wasn't any doubt. The man was Murchison and the woman was Isabel. Mercifully she was too drunk to recognize me.

Three days have passed since I left off writing. I couldn't write any more. I couldn't sleep. All I could do was think, and so I walked the streets all night in the rain and when I came in in the morning the hunting dog was still howling, dismally and monotonously.

I've just come from the cemetery that lies on the edge of the forest. There were only two of us there beside the Anglican rector—Murchison and myself. We covered the raw red earth with a blanket of flowers. I don't think we said twenty words to each other. What was there to say except, "I knew her when she was a girl," and you couldn't well say that with the memory of the

drunken harridan leaning against the doorway of that terrible salon in the Pavillon Dorée.

They found her in the kitchen in the morning in a pool of blood. She had cut her throat. She died, you see, as she had always lived, in a sensation. She would have liked a great story of her romantic love and death. But Murchison and I cheated her out of that. We've hushed things up. We can at least spare her family this last blow.

I should never have sent this letter and I never would have sent it to anyone but you, because I knew you'd be interested and would understand. I'm trusting you to keep the secret along with Murchison and me. I can never come to Fontainebleau again. I can't help regretting that, even though it seems selfish and small. I did love it. And poor Murchison. I don't know what he'll do. I'm taking him back to Paris with me.

It's things like this that make me regret the fact that I never took up writing seriously. How right was the man who said that truth is stranger than fiction!

I can't write any more now. I'm still feeling

it too deeply. And again I beg of you to say nothing of this to anyone, because—well, because Isabel was one of us once. She grew up with us. She used to celebrate her birthday with you in the old house on Murray Hill. Who would have thought that such things would happen to her?

Remember me to George, and if you come to Paris this summer, let me know. I have an exquisite little place at Chantilly. I should love to entertain you both. We could so enjoy ourselves discussing old times.

WALTER

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· XI ·

AUNT MILLY CROSSES THE BAR

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

AUNT MILLY CROSSES *the* BAR

IT'S too bad you were late, Etta. If you hadn't been, we wouldn't have had to sit way back here in the alcove with all those palms in front of us.

I didn't mean to be late, only that Hofbein girl who comes in to look after little Herman was late. He'd finished his bottle before she got there. Anyway, Cousin Horace otta have saved us a seat up front.

Yes, it's just like Horace. Is little Herman still on Horton's Food?

That's what made me late. Yes. He's still on Horton's Food.

[It

AUNT MILLY CROSSES THE BAR

It never agreed with Hazel. She always spit it up, sooner or later. Or else it worked the other way.

It sits fine on little Herman. . . . No, you take the gilt chair, Irma. I'll take the horsehair. Since Herman was born I haven't been able to sit on anything hard. Anyhow, my sit-upon is bigger than yours.

I must say Cousin Horace might have saved a place for us. We're her own nieces, after all.

Yes, especially after Aunt Milly and I had just made up our difference before she died.

But Horace wants to keep us in the background. It's just like him, always making up to Aunt Milly. I'll bet he was there when she made her will, standing over her shoulder and dictating it.

I must say that if I take the trouble to go to a funeral I want to sit somewhere near the casket.

I wonder if we could ask Mrs. Simpkins to move that palm a little. . . . Mrs. Simpkins . . . Mrs. Simpkins . . . Pardon me, but would you mind pushing that palm just a little to one side . . . There . . . Yes, that's enough, thank you. We couldn't see anything.

AUNT MILLY CROSSES THE BAR

Thank you, Mrs. Simpkins . . . You can see we weren't treated very well by Cousin Horace, Mrs. Simpkins. We're nieces of the deceased, after all. . . . There . . . That's much better . . . Now we can see perfectly . . . My, doesn't she look natural?

Yes, so calm and young, too. You'd never think her kidneys had been like that for ten years. There are my flowers over there . . . just over there, by her feet . . . the calla lilies and swansonias.

Swansonia is a pretty name.

Yes, I thought of that. I didn't send roses or carnations. They're so ordinary.

I disagree, Irma. I think roses and carnations go with funerals, somehow. I sent carnations . . . Those are mine . . . the red ones . . . just there under the casket plate.

The blanket of roses. I wonder who sent that?

It was the Eastern Star. They always send a blanket of roses when one of the lodge members die.

My, it's just as well to know that. What would you do if two blankets of roses were sent to your funeral? Someone would have their feelings hurt.

There's old Mrs. Cosgrove seated right in the

[front

front row where the family ought to be. She always takes the best seat.

She must come before the doors are open.

Oh, Irma! You oughtn't to make jokes on an occasion like this.

I wonder when they're going to begin. It's almost three now, and Horace said it was to be at two-thirty.

Aunt Milly was always late.

You're just the limit!

Is there to be a quartet?

I'm sure I don't know. Horace didn't tell me anything.

I hope they'll sing "Crossing the Bar."

Don't talk so loud, Irma. People are looking around.

Is that tall man the new mortician?

The new what?

Mortician. Haven't you seen the card in his window, saying you mustn't call him an undertaker. He's a mortician.

Oh, undertaker! Yes, that's Mr. Krantz. Isn't he good-looking?

A bit sour-looking.

Of course, just now. That's his professional

manner. He's gotta do that. He ain't really sour. You ought to know him when he's not on a case.

You know him?

Do I know him? My, yes. In the evenings when he hasn't a case, he comes over to our house to play euchre. But I didn't know he calls himself a mortician.

Yes, he calls himself a mortician.

Hmm! Mortician . . . Well, I've learned something new.

He has a sympathetic face.

Yes, he's very sympathetic. You must come over some evening and meet him.

I'd love to. . . . They must be beginning soon, now. . . . This chair is hard as Tophet!

Etta, can you reach that pin in the middle of my back. It's come undone.

Turn round a bit . . . There! I have it.

I told Homer when he bought it for me that it ought to have a patent clasp.

There's Cousin Emma coming in. Nobody ever invites her to anything but funerals.

I don't wonder. She's such a complainer. You'd think nobody in the world ever had liver complaint before.

[Do

AUNT MILLY CROSSES THE BAR

Do you remember how she went on when she had gallstones?

Do I? Did you know she had one of the stones made up in a pin for her husband to wear?

My, she's aged!

Ah, there's the rector.

It's funny about Aunt Milly joining the Episcopal church.

Well, between us, Etta, she was always a little stuck up, especially after she came into Grandpa Schoessel's money.

I never liked that Doctor Corning.

He's white and soft like a worm. And he reads the service like Mrs. Milliken singing an anthem.

We mustn't talk so loud now. They're beginning.

No . . .

I hate the smell of tuberoses, Etta.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. . . . "

That's a pretty line . . . I always like that.

Yes, it makes you believe in the Hereafter.

But I prefer the Baptist service. It's more simple.

And more spontaneous.

Yes, I think there's nothing like spontaneousness at a time like this.

"For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday. . . ."

Look at Cousin Emma crying.

What has she got to cry about. If she was like me, with five children . . .

"Seeing that is past as a watch in the night. . . ."

There's the quartet, Irma. They're gonna have a quartet.

Good! I'm glad there's gonna be a quartet.

Maybe they'll sing "Crossing the Bar."

"So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Oh, Etta! Remind me to ask you something as soon as we get out!

I will.

Look at Horace's sour face.

He looks as if he'd made sure of all the money.

She always promised me the parlor suite.

"Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, in His wise providence, to take out of this world the soul of our deceased sister."

[It's

AUNT MILLY CROSSES THE BAR

It's too bad they didn't have the service in Mr. Krantz's new mortuary chapel. It would have been the first service to open the chapel.

And we wouldn't have been stuck in an alcove behind all these palms, where we couldn't see a thing.

"The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all forevermore. Amen."

Don't forget to remind me!

Now they're going to sing.

Quartet music is lovely, I think . . . just lovely.

They always ought to have a quartet at a funeral.

Who's that, Etta, sitting over there by Aunt Milly's head? It can't be one of the Des Moines connections . . . not Ralph Saunders.

It looks to me like Ralph Saunders.

Well, I never! Of all things! They say he's going to be made head of the bank over there.

I shouldn't have thought he'd have come all the way from Des Moines.

Maybe he thinks he's mentioned in the will.

It would be just like Aunt Milly to leave every-

thing to a home for cats and dogs. I've heard of such things.

Shh! . . . I want to listen to the singing. . . . It's this part I think is just lovely. . . . "Twilight and Evening Star" . . . and the part, too, about the Pilot. . . . Have you got a handkerchief, Etta? . . . I can never think to bring a handkerchief. . . . Thank you. There . . . I always think there's nothing like a good cry . . . nothing . . . it does you good. If I should die suddenly, Etta, will you remember that I want a quartet to sing "Crossing the Bar."

Don't talk such nonsense!

I can't help it. "In the midst of life we are in death!" That's a beautiful line, I think. It makes you humble. . . .

Don't get hysterical, Irma.

When I think about leaving all the children and little Hazel, not yet walking . . .

You're not going to die. . . . I must say Mr. Krantz is a fine-looking man.

Don't forget to remind me, Etta!

There now, they're finished. . . . I must say I'm sorry, but we can get out into the air. Get up, Irma! Let's get down near the head of the line,

so we won't have to be the last. Go ahead! Just push past Cousin Emma.

Here comes Horace, the oily hypocrite!

I'm surprised that he'd bother to take notice of us! How-de-do, Cousin Horace! Yes, everything went off well, except that it began too late.

Yes, it'll be dark before we get to the cemetery.

Oh, so we're in the third cab . . . both of us?

Thank you!

I tried to be cold to him.

You were fine, Etta. You'd have froze an iceberg.

I'd like to have asked him when they're going to read the will, but I thought it wouldn't be in good taste.

No, it wouldn't have been in good taste . . . not with her not cold yet.

Why are they so slow?

Ah, yes, those are my carnations, right there by your feet.

She *does* look natural, doesn't she?

It's surprising how natural they can make people look, nowadays.

Yes, I always say Science is a wonderful thing . . . a wonderful thing.

But I guess Mr. Krantz is pretty good.

One of the best!

She's being buried in her mauve satin.

Yes, she always told me she'd kept it all these years to be buried in.

It's a shame to bury that cameo pin with her.

Yes, I can never see the use of burying good jewelry.

That's Horace again. It's his doing. I don't suppose he'll miss a cameo pin out of all she's left him.

There! My, it's good to be in the air again after all those flowers.

He said the third cab, didn't he?

Yes, the third.

I wish cabs didn't always smell so of ammonia.

I don't see why they don't try some sort of perfume.

There now!

What on earth's the matter? For goodness' sake!

I knew you wouldn't remember to remind me.

I was going to if you'd given me time.

It's about that claret-colored velvet like you used for little Etta's coat. Where did you get it?

[At

At Semple and Faulkner's. But it was a remnant.

Dear me, I hope they have some more in!

You can go and see.

I'll stop there after the cemetery.

I'll go with you. I want to look for some dotted Swiss to make up for little Herman.

I hope they won't be too long at the cemetery, or Semple and Faulkner's will be closed.

There comes the casket now.

Don't forget, Etta. You promised to invite me to meet Mr. Krantz.

No, Irma, I won't. How about tomorrow night? I forget . . . does Bryan play euchre?

He does. . . .

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· XII ·

LET'S GO TO HINKY-DINK'S

A Sentimental Story

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

LET'S GO *to* HINKY-DINK'S

A Sentimental Story

IT was five in the afternoon when John Champion came into the Ritz out of the hot white spaces of the Place Vendôme and met his grandson George. The boy had just emerged from the bar, and the old man fancied that he moved unsteadily; but it may only have been his fancy, for he was worried about the boy. As he watched him making his way through the crowd, he thought, "Perhaps I am an old fusscat. . . . Times have changed!"

But he called to George as he passed and said gently, "You don't think you're going it a bit hard, do you, George?"

[The

The boy laughed. He was like the tall bent old man in so many ways. They had the same bright blue eyes, the same straight nose. Both of them were handsome. It was as if in looking at the pair, one saw only the old man, John Champion, in two periods of his long, rich life, as a man past seventy and as a boy of twenty.

"Oh, I'm all right, Gramp," he said. "Don't worry about me. We carry our liquor well in these days. We have to, drinking so much hard stuff."

He spoke with a swaggering air of contempt for a generation which knew not gin. Gramp belonged to a generation which had drunk only good Burgundies and champagne and Rhine wines.

The old man laid a gentle hand on his grandson's shoulder. "I don't mind your enjoying yourself. Young fellows must work off steam. . . . I was thinking of Betty. You mustn't make a spectacle of yourself before your sister."

"Oh, Betty!" said George, and laughed again, as if the women of *his* day, and certainly his own sister Betty, knew how to look out for themselves.

John Champion frowned a little and asked, "D'you think you could look out for her tonight?

Because, I'm feeling tired, more tired than usual . . . I think I'll dine in my room and give up the theatre. Could you manage?"

"Trust us. I'll run along and tell Betty."

"Of course, you may keep the theatre tickets. There are three of them. You might ask a friend."

"Sure, Gramp. We'll find someone. There are lots of people we know, running about in Paris. I'll tell her." He turned and looked sharply at the old man. "You aren't sick or anything?"

"No; just tired."

And the boy was swallowed up in the cheap crowd that thronged the corridors, hot and overdressed, hurried and harassed, many painted and decayed. It was a throng that spoke a dozen tongues, but more frequently than any other English or American, the rich twanging American that one could recognize everywhere, piercing the murmur of conversation like the sound of a motor-horn, or the flat, monotonous English that wore persistently through all the clamor like the ceaseless pounding of a flat wheel. The door of the bar opened and a trembling wave of confused chatter flooded into the hallway. Americans . . . most of

them . . . drinking to make up for lost time. At home . . . prohibition.

John Champion, turned away, sighed and moved toward the lift. Times had changed. . . . He kept thinking of himself as a boy of twenty in the Paris of fifty years ago.

In his room he sat for a long time looking out at the gay little garden, so bright, so pretty, so artificial, so filled with hard, determinedly bright faces. Perhaps, he thought, he was wrong to worry about these grandchildren of his. Perhaps, as people said, this generation was able to look out for itself. But he was disappointed, somehow, in a fashion he could neither define nor understand. He had brought them, as soon as their school was over, to Europe so that they might see with his eyes this Paris which all his life he had adored, loving it passionately while he moved through its wide white squares, seeing it always in a mirage of enchantment during the long years when he was forced to be away from it. When good Americans die, he thought, they go to Paris!

He smiled. Yes. Paris . . . his Paris . . . would make a good sort of heaven. Only now there was

something wrong. There was a vague, uneasy sense of something spoiled which he could not drive from his thoughts. He had imagined it so many times . . . how he would show George and Betty his beloved Paris, as he had shown it to their mother (God rest her soul) in the late Nineties, how he would make them see it with his eyes as a magic place for enjoyment. It would be almost like being young once more, almost like coming upon the enchanted city as he had done so long ago. (It was nearly fifty years now. In those days the streets had been lighted by the soft flare of gaslights.)

But the reality had not followed the pattern of his imagination. He had not succeeded in making George and Betty see it with his eyes. Somehow they had found a Paris of their own which existed in a blaze of light with motors racing and tearing at top speed. Their Paris was a city in which they kept meeting friends like themselves, the girls self-reliant and a little boisterous like Betty, the boys sometimes a little . . . well, a little as George had been as he came from the bar a little while before. It was a Paris filled with Americans, where there was no quiet solitude and

everything was done in crowds. But perhaps it was not altogether their fault. One must be generous.

"It is hard," thought John Champion, "to imagine being so young again and so full of life."

And perhaps it was not their fault that they could not see the Paris he adored. Somehow at times he himself found it very difficult. Perhaps it had gone. Surely the crowd that swept in and out of the doors into the Place Vendôme was not the Paris he had known. It seemed overrun, and vulgar, and cheap, and noisy. Those faces below him there in the garden . . . cracked and hard. There was nothing romantic or picturesque about them.

And presently the old gentleman rose and turned on the water in his bath. When he had bathed, he put on clean linen and dressed slowly and carefully, not at all like a man who planned to have dinner alone in his room. And when he had finished, he stood for a moment looking at the tall, spare reflection of a man who had done his duty in the world, a man who was wealthy, and distinguished—in short, a gentleman of taste.

And at last he took up from the dressing-table

a key with a tag attached to it bearing the legend "Agence Wolff. Numero— Boulevard Haussmann" and thrust it carefully into his pocket. The long soft summer twilight of Paris (that was one thing that could not change) had begun to descend before he put on his top hat, a little on one side in a rakish manner, and walked out of his room. He was a very handsome man, and completely a man of the world, that which perhaps his grandson would never be.

A sitting-room separated the room of John Champion from that occupied by his granddaughter. When young George knocked on the door and came in unsteadily, his sister met him in a kimono. She resembled her brother and her grandfather, but was darker than either, with big brown eyes that would have been lovely if they had not been so alert and restless.

Said George, "The old boy is not going out tonight. He feels seedy. So we can throw a proper party."

"Gramp is all right, isn't he?" she asked. "He's not ill or anything?"

"No; he's just tired. He's an old man. You can't expect him to keep up with us."

Betty lighted a cigarette. "What are the tickets for?"

"The Comédie Française."

"And the play?"

"Something or other by Victor Hugo . . . Ruy Blas, I think. We don't want to see it. . . . I had enough of that bird in school. . . . "

"We could give the tickets away."

"Who to? Nobody we know wants to spend an evening in cold storage."

George thought for a moment, hazily. "Well," he said at last, with a triumphant air, "we can throw them away!"

A light came into Betty's eyes. "We could see something snappy . . . the new revue with Spinelly."

"But Gramp will ask us about the play at the Comédie."

"We can tell him about it just the same. . . . We can say we forgot to bring home the program. . . . "

"Yes," said George. "That can be done . . . We mustn't hurt his feelings. He's sentimental about Paris and things like the Comédie."

George took the three tickets from his pocket,

tore them across and flung them into the waste-paper-basket. "I'll have to hustle out and get tickets. And while I'm gone you can call up someone and fix up a party . . . the Spencers. They're always out for a good time."

"Right-o," said Betty. "But hurry and get the tickets. We've got to hurry."

George disappeared and Betty, cigarette in one hand, took up the telephone.

"Saxe 8472. . . . Oui . . . 8472." Her French was not beautiful, but vigorous and efficient.

"I want to speak to Mrs. Spencer. . . . She's not in? Mr. Spencer will do. . . . Hello . . . Hello . . . Is that you, Harry? This is Betty. George and I are throwing a party. Gramp is staying in tonight and we want you and Helen . . . Oh, you must come! . . . You can throw them over . . . They're past thirty . . . middle-aged . . . Never mind Helen. Just call them up and say she's not feeling well . . . Please, Harry, don't spoil our fun! It's our one evening free. . . . [*Then, in a soft cooing voice*] Listen, Harry, I'll devote myself to you. We'll lose George and Helen and I'll do whatever you say. . . . You will? . . . Grand! . . . Stop for us here and we'll dine at the Madrid.

[George

George is getting tickets for Spinelly . . . In half an hour . . . Good-by."

As John Champion stepped into the Place Vendôme, he waved aside the waiting taxicabs. It was a gentle evening, cooler now that over the garden of the Tuileries the blue shadows had begun to settle. He felt less weary. Somehow, as the evening came down over the city, his old Paris seemed for a moment to take form in the shadows and approach, mirage-like, enticing him on; but it never came near enough to be touched or to assume a solid reality. The lights were too brilliant, the sound of motor-horns too ear-splitting, the echo of American voices too clear in his ear. He stopped for a moment to stare at a countrywoman, hard, handsome, superbly dressed, stepping from an Hispano-Suiza with two men on the box.

"They dress better than the French women themselves," he thought, "but there is something lacking . . . some feminine quality, some softness, . . . piquancy, perhaps . . . allure. The effect is not the same."

Through the twilight he walked on until he turned into the long arcade of the Rue de Rivoli.

Here, with all the shops closed, it was less crowded. Sometimes even a word of French came to the ears . . . a word of French which in these days sounded strangely foreign in the very capital of France. He smiled.

"Some day," he thought, "the French will wake up to discover that their capital is an American city and they'll never know how it happened. . . . Infiltration . . . That was what they called the process during the war."

He came to the end of the long blue gallery and turned into the vast misty spaces of the Place de la Concorde. The motors dashed this way and that, brushing his very body in their shrieking progress. In a moment he was safe again on the other side by the Crillon. Thence into the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré . . . an honorable street which had lost little of its old beauty and dignity.

As he walked his hand kept touching the key in his pocket with the label "Agence Wolff . . . Numero— Boulevard Haussmann." His long handsome fingers caressed it softly and the touch communicated to the fine old head some memory, some idea which caused him to smile as if that worn,

clumsy key had been the key to Paradise. It had been easy to get from the Agency. He simply told them that he was looking for an apartment. They knew him . . . John Champion . . . the American lawyer. They trusted him because his name was an honorable one, as well known in Europe as in America.

He smiled again when he thought what great luck it had been to find the apartment empty and looking for tenants. . . . Tenants! Tenants! How many of them had there been in that apartment since he had lived there, a young man, in the days when it was red and gold and new, a little vulgar perhaps, but grand and spacious and touched by a warm, somber elegance. How many tenants had passed through its doors since the morning when with a terrible sadness, he turned the key . . . perhaps this same clumsy worn key . . . in the lock, and so closed the door forever on his youth, that first bright youth with all its illusions and hopes and anxieties . . . and love, too, a love which he even now (a half-century afterward) respected and cherished among his most precious secrets.

And now here he was, an old, old man walking along the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré in the

soft, falling darkness in search of the youth on which he had turned the key more than half a century ago.

At the Café Glacière, he summoned the head waiter, a shrewd man who recognized at once the distinction and bearing of the old gentleman.

"I want a dinner for two," said John Champion, in the clearest, most exquisite French, "served in my apartment on the second floor of Numero— Boulevard Haussmann."

"And will you order, or shall I send you a fine dinner?"

"I will order. There is to be a lady," said John Champion. "And I want the wine and the dishes of which she is fond. She is a woman of taste."

"Certainly, M'sieur," echoed the head waiter, and a twinkle came into his eye. A gentleman so old . . . so distinguished . . . so *homme du monde.*

So John Champion ordered the dinner. There were delicacies of this sort and that, and two or three fine wines, and once or twice he was interrupted by the lift of the head waiter's eyebrows and the sound of his voice murmuring, "Ah, that! . . . That, Monsieur, we have not had for a long time. It is a dish that is almost forgotten. People

don't care for food as they used to. But all the same André—he's our chef, Monsieur,—will be glad to oblige. It will make him feel that there is some excuse for his art."

So John Champion turned into the Boulevard Haussmann and walked until he came to Numero —, and there he stood for a long time looking at the front of the house. All the shutters were up, for the tenants had gone out of Paris in the heat. It was unchanged, remarkably unchanged, save that the stone was worn now and weathered into a soft old grey. And the trees had grown . . . prodigiously. Once they had been only small striplings of trees, planted there according to the plan of Baron Haussmann when he tore down old Paris and raised the long white avenues.

The concierge, too, had changed. Fifty years ago he had been a fat little old man who remembered Napoleon and had been at Wagram. The concierge who admitted John Champion was a gaunt old woman with a mustache . . . a peasant from Normandy, to judge from her appearance.

"It is a fine evening, Madame," said John Champion. "I have come to look at the apartment on the second floor."

"Ah, oui, M'sieur. . . . It has been empty for a long time. No one keeps it for long."

John Champion laughed. "Is it ghosts, Madame? For I am not afraid of ghosts. They run from me."

The old woman with the mustache crossed herself. "Who knows?" she replied with a shrug. "It has been so always, as far back as anyone can remember. They say that at times the rooms smell of violets. That's all. I shouldn't have told you, M'sieur, but if I hadn't the charwoman would have told or the grocer's boy. . . . "

"The rooms smell of violets," murmured John Champion. "That seems a pleasant ghost who keeps the room always filled with flowers."

"Yes, Monsieur. I say it is nonsense."

The old woman stood watching as he climbed the stairs, and (as she said on the following morning to the grocer's boy) "the old gentleman seemed so strong and well. At each step, he seemed somehow to grow younger." But she did not understand, of course, that each step was bringing John Champion nearer and nearer to that far-off youth.

The worn clumsy key fitted easily into the lock, so that John Champion, turning the handle of the

door, found himself suddenly, and with a little shock, in a room filled with thick darkness. There were little bars of silver where the light from the street filtered through the shutters. He stood there for a moment, hesitating to make a light of any sort lest in some way the little drawing-room had changed so that, after all, it would be a strange spot that he would not know. But at length he took the silver briquet from his pocket (he kept it in perfect condition so that it always worked admirably) and the spark, leaping from the flint to the little wick saturated in alcohol, gave birth to a flame which illuminated all the room. Out of the darkness familiar chairs and tables emerged, here a picture, there an expanse of heavy brocade curtains, drawn now to shut out the light from the old-fashioned flowered carpet. The flame struck a bit of crystal in the chandelier and was splintered into a million multicolored rays of light. It was an enchanted place. Nothing had changed. It seemed to him that the very chairs sat in the same places, waiting to greet him as they had done years ago, when he returned from the Comédie Française on the night they gave Ruy Blas.

He walked across the little drawing-room and,

opening the door painted with fading, delicate flowers, stepped into the little bedroom. Here, too, nothing had changed. Perhaps a chair or two had replaced the old ones. Perhaps the brocade of the canopy that hung over the gilt bed was new. He could not be certain. It was difficult to remember exactly. It was here in this little gilt bed, with the great canopy of faint blue brocade, that she had died, slowly, gently, as she had lived, with John Champion sitting at her side, her hand clinging to his trustfully.

When at last he turned away, he closed the flowered door gently behind him and held the flame of the briquet high. There were no lights in the place save only two or three partly burned candles, left by the last tenant, in the Empire candelabra before the tall mirror that surmounted the little fireplace. One by one, thoughtfully, he lighted these and as each wick burst into flame it seemed that the room became less ghostly and more alive. The little yellow flames kindled a light in the eyes of the old man. Holding the candelabra high above his head, he pulled a gilt table into the middle of the room and placed it in the center. Then he drew up a pair of gilt chairs, one on each

side. She would be arriving soon. Now, again, after half a century, he went through the identical preparations. She played only small parts at the Comédie, like the page in Ruy Blas, for she was very young yet and inexperienced, and so, was able to leave early.

There was a knock at the door and John Champion, starting suddenly, called out, "Entrez!"

It was the waiter from the Glacière, bearing a great tray, and behind him a red-cheeked bus-boy bearing another, somewhat smaller, with bottles of wine on it.

"Lay places for two," he said to the waiter. "Yes, two . . . here on the gilt table. Mademoiselle has not yet come in."

Swiftly, silently, the waiter went about his business while John Champion, tall and white-haired against the heavy brocade curtains, stood watching. The waiters had not changed; they were the same even to the mustaches. When the service had finished, he said, "Now, you may go."

"Monsieur does not wish to be served?"

"No."

When they had gone, John Champion approached the table and slowly, with a fastidious

elegance, he laid out the *hors-d'œuvres variés* which she had always loved with an enthusiasm that was almost childish. When he had done this, he seated himself opposite the empty place and opened a bottle of wine, but in the very midst of the action he halted suddenly and looked about him, breathing in the air of the faded, pleasant little room.

It was the odor of violets, distant and faint, but unmistakable . . . the old, woodlike odor of the great purple violets he had once bought, night after night, from the flower-carts behind the Madeleine.

"Perhaps," he thought, "it is my imagination spurred by what the concierge told me."

And he returned again to the business of opening the wine. It was not until he had filled not only one glass but two, that he sat quite still once more and looked about him into the shadows. There could be no doubt of it . . . there were violets somewhere in the room . . . fresh, cool violets. The scent was less faint now. It came to him clearly, as if someone had approached and placed the bouquet on the very table beside the wine-glass that stood opposite him.

LET'S GO TO HINKY-DINK'S

It was a little after seven when a motor, painted red and very noisy in its approach, and driven by a young man in tweeds beside a young woman dressed in crimson wearing a tiny hat pulled over her eyes, drew up to the door of the Ritz and was hailed at once by George Champion and his sister Betty with cries of delight. The young man and the young woman had been married but a year, but the young woman made haste to spring from the seat beside her husband and join young George in the tonneau. Only Betty hesitated.

"George," she asked, "you didn't forget the flask?"

Cries of reproach greeted her inquiry. "A flask! In Paris!"

"It's for cocktails," protested Betty. "Here . . . in Paris . . . "

"Oh," said Harry Spencer. "You're still green in Paris."

Betty flushed because Harry made her seem young and naive. "Well, you see we haven't been out on the Town. We've been going around with Gramp. This is our first night on the loose."

She climbed in beside Harry Spencer and with a great roar the red motor hastened to get under

way, for it was blocking the progress of a dozen similar motors in the business of picking up other Americans setting out to "throw a regular party." They seemed all to be in parties, in crowds. No one was setting out alone, quietly, though the evening was turning blue and soft and seductive.

"Great Scott! it's hot!" exclaimed Betty. "I haven't been cool since I landed here. George keeps cool by staying in the bar."

The bright red motor swept through the boulevards like a hurricane, dodging buses, motors and pedestrians. From the back seat Helen Spencer's voice, a little weary and jaded, sang out, "For heaven's sake, Harry, hurry up! We'll never get back from the Madrid in time for the show . . . " (and then derisively) "I thought this car was supposed to have speed!"

The houses, the gardens, the white squares, faintly blue now in the descent of the evening, swept past them in a blurred stream. No one saw them, but, after all, as Harry Spencer said, "We don't come to Paris to look at old buildings."

Betty turned in her seat. "Stop, Harry! Wait at least until the evening has begun." For Harry Spencer had given her hand a violent squeeze.

["But

"But you promised me."

The voice of George from the rear seat. "Where shall we go after the play?"

And then Helen Spencer, who had taken off her hat and allowed her hair to flow in the wind, answering him. "Oh, let's go to Hinky-Dink's. . . . It's the best jazz in Paris. . . . The nigger band can't be beat. . . . Besides, everyone we know will be there. It's the only place anyone goes nowadays. . . . "

Crowds . . . Crowds . . . Always in crowds.

Behind the shutters and the thick brocade of the second floor at Numero— Boulevard Haussmann, the candles burned lower and lower in the midst of the dishes and wine-glasses on the little gilt table. No sounds penetrated the thick curtains, not even the sound of a noisy, red motor that roared wildly by on its way to the Bois de Boulogne and back again on its way to the Bouffes Parisiens.

The old man sat leaning back a little, with his eyes partly closed, quietly, without making a sound. The food—all those delicacies that had come in from the Glacière—lay untouched, turning cold

beneath the candlelight. His own wine-glass he had emptied, but the one that stood opposite, next to that bouquet of violets, so invisible, so fragrant, so fresh and woodlike, (as if his friend as she sat there had placed them by her side), remained untouched. John Champion leaned back in his gilt chair and bowed his head. He felt very tired, for some reason. It seemed that he had been slipping back, back, back across all the expanse of years until at length he was overcome by a strange sensation of having left this old, weary body—of having, somehow, stepped out of it and become young again, incredibly young and ardent and handsome, a boy of twenty-one in a claret-colored waistcoat and a high collar, who looked for all the world like young George. But the strangest thing . . . the thing which confused him and in a vague fashion filled him with alarm . . . was the fact that he seemed to be watching this boy who was himself. And the boy had been joined now by a girl with fine black hair which she wore drawn back into a little knot at the back of her lovely neck, a girl who came in, her cheeks bright with the flush that sometimes frightened him, throwing back her cape to greet him with

a slow, tender smile as she stood there in her crinolines, her bonnet fallen back with its ribbons caught about her white throat. In one hand she carried a little muff and a bouquet of violets. She was cool and lovely and on the fur of her tippet there were little flecks of snow which had not yet melted. She coughed faintly, in a deprecating fashion, as if it troubled her lest she should alarm him.

The old man stirred and spoke then for the first time.

"Irène," he said softly; and again, "Irène."

It was midnight when George and Betty and the Harry Spencers fought their way through the hot crowd to a table at Hinky-Dink's.

"I won't have any trouble," boasted Harry Spencer. "I knew Hinky-Dink when he was just a nigger bartender in Harlem."

And, sure enough, there before them stood Hinky-Dink, an immense coal-black negro, showing his expanse of white teeth in a broad grin at the approach of Harry Spencer. Above the sound of "Red-Hot Mamma!" blared out by a half-dozen saxophones, the big negro led them to a

little table at one side, where they seated themselves, very hot and a little deafened, with their backs touching the backs of other Americans who sat squeezed into the little room.

"This is the real stuff!" screamed Helen Spencer above the din. She shook her tousled blonde hair. "I guess George and Betty are seeing life for the first time in Paris." Then she seized her husband by the arm and shouted in his ear, "They ought to meet Mazie. Go over and fetch her!"

So Harry Spencer, while the others ordered drinks concocted of gin and whisky, went uncertainly across the crowded floor and brought a mulatto girl in a short skirt with a tail attached to emphasize her resemblance to a monkey. She was introduced.

"When are you going to dance?" screamed Helen Spencer.

"Right away . . . Miss . . . right away," said the mulatto girl. "As soon as they turn down the lights."

The lights went down and Mazie, stepping into the glow of a red calcium light, thrust out her stomach and began to dance wildly, a barbaric dance that revealed to the hot, tired crowd all

the muscles that lay beneath the satiny yellow skin. It was a wild dance, born in the jungles and translated into new figures and patterns through a whole century-old corridor of barrooms and brothels.

Above the whine of the saxophones, Harry Spencer leaned close to Betty and said, "Let's go for a ride. We can slip out now and tell George and Helen we've gone for some air. They can get home all right."

There was a little struggle, for into the eyes of Betty there had come a strange look of fright at something which lay beyond her understanding. It was a vague, nameless terror of the crowd and the noise, the heat and the sight of the dancer's bare rippling skin. The negroes were shouting now, urging Mazie into a frenzy of contortions. She was frightened as if she had been caught by something from which she could not escape.

"You promised," said Harry Spencer.

And silently Betty rose and followed him through the darkness into the street where the big red motor stood waiting at the curb.

It was long after midnight when the motor turned through the Porte Dauphine and came at

last to a halt near the Grotto and Cascade. In the darkness Harry Spencer shut off the engine and, leaning across, put his hand on her knee.

"Don't, Harry! Don't. . . . "

"Don't what? What do you mean?"

She allowed him to kiss her, struggling not to show that it made her feel ill. "I don't like it . . . "

"You promised me. You said, 'I'll devote myself to you.' . . . You said, 'I'll do whatever you want.' "

"I can't help it," said Betty . . . "I can't . . . Besides, it's wrong when we've just left Helen."

Spencer laughed. "Don't worry about that. You needn't think of her. . . . Why, she's divorcing me."

"But why, Harry? . . . You've only been married a little while."

He laughed again. "She says we're tired of each other . . . I'm leaving the hotel tomorrow." He took her hand, suddenly. "No, don't preach to me. . . . Maybe, you'd marry me when I'm free again. We might try . . . " He laughed again, with a slightly tipsy air. "There's nothing like trying . . . And if you marry every time, why,

it's all right. Nobody cares . . . nowadays. Come on. It won't matter. Nobody cares."

But she was stubborn and frightened.

In her room at the Ritz, the girl did not sleep. She lay awake, tossing and still frightened a little, until the dawn came in across the little garden and the sounds of a hot, overcrowded Paris began again beneath the window. The shadow, the terror, which had touched her suddenly in the midst of that wild, obscene dance in the hot, crowded room at Hinky-Dink's would not be shaken off. It was not to be driven away by trying to read, or by a shower of cold water, or even by the breakfast and the Paris *Herald* which arrived at length on a tray.

At ten o'clock, while she was dressing, there was a knock at the door and George's voice, tired and rasping, came through the paneling. She fancied for a moment that it carried an echo of her own terror.

"Let me in!" he cried. "Let me in!"

She opened the door and George, looking white and exhausted but doing his best to assume a manly air, said, "I've had bad news!"

"Is it about Gramp?"

George nodded.

"Is he dead?" (She was really frightened now.)

"Yes . . . he's dead."

She made a sudden movement toward the door leading into the sitting-room, and then half-fell into the chair beside her.

"He's not there," said George quietly. "He's dead in an apartment in the Boulevard Haussmann. He didn't dine alone in his room. He went out before we left and he never came back."

Betty began suddenly to cry hysterically. "I knew it. . . . I knew something had happened. I knew it . . . last night while we were at Hinky-Dink's."

So George put his arms about the thin shoulders and kissed her with a sudden, unaccustomed, brotherly affection. In the bright sunlight that streamed in through the windows, he sat beside her and told her the story.

"It's very queer," he said, looking very white and sobered in the end. "No one knows why he ordered dinner for two people. There was a place laid for someone else, but whoever it was for didn't come, for the food wasn't touched. At the Agence

Wolff, they said he asked for the key because he wanted to rent an apartment. I can't understand that. He must have been a little childish. The candles were burnt out and a waiter from the Glacière found him sitting upright in a gilt chair beside the bed. One hand lay on the cover. The concierge said it looked as if he had been holding the hand of someone who was lying there . . . very ill. Only there wasn't anyone in the bed and there hadn't been. And the apartment, they say, smells of violets, fresh violets . . . but there aren't violets anywhere . . . not even in Paris . . . in the middle of August."

AWAKE AND REHEARSE

· XIII ·

THE APOTHECARY

BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD

The APOTHECARY

HE was a small, bent, ageless little man with a scraggly black beard, and he lived and had his shop in two rooms in the basement of an ancient tottering house on the edge of that once worldly quarter, the Faubourg St. Germain. It was on the edge of that part of Paris made fashionable for a second time by Americans who were immensely rich or "artistic" and sometimes both. The house was not quite in the quarter, for just at its back tottered rows of rookeries which house the poor of Montparnasse. It was from these houses that the Apothecary drew

the less lucrative part of his trade. His shop was so dark and so evil-smelling that only those who could not afford the prices of the glittering, brightly lighted shops came to him for the things which an apothecary usually carries in his stock. But besides these things he was said also to sell strange mixtures and nostrums for restoring the vigor, developing the figure and bringing husbands to young girls without dots. He even had (it was said) a powder which if burned while repeating the proper incantations had the power of suffocating an enemy even though he were at the other side of the earth. It was known also in the proper quarters that he sold drugs which had qualities more certain of their effect. It was these powders and liquids that attracted many ladies and gentlemen who seemed strangely out of place in the little den beneath the turn of the stairs in the house on the Rue Jacquinot.

He had been there always, as far back as any citizen of the neighborhood could remember. He held an ancient lease which he refused to surrender even after the dirty picturesqueness of the quarter began to grow fashionable. He clung to it even when the old house was renovated and had its

front redone like the face of an old harridan, by the German Jew who owned it and had the shrewdness to install baths and make it livable without destroying its picturesqueness. The house and the Apothecary were inseparable. Each without the other would have lost something of its character. As you entered, you sometimes caught a swift glimpse of a dirty black beard from which gleamed two small, rat-like eyes—all seen dimly through the shadows of the evil-smelling shop. Sometimes you caught the queer green light of a second pair of eyes. These were the eyes of the Apothecary's cat, a black, unfriendly animal.

There was no concierge in the house of the Apothecary, because he himself, by virtue of that unbreakable lease, occupied the quarters that should have been those of a concierge, and so it was a house in which you were quite free to do as you pleased. There was no one to watch you leave or enter, no one to see whom you brought to your flat, no one to see what strange people paid you visits. Because none of the fleeting tenants considered the Apothecary as human. No one ever thought that he might watch what went on in the house. He was only a gnome who lived

underground and was never seen after he put up his clumsy shutters at the fall of night.

Because it was this sort of house, it came to attract one by one persons whose mode of life, whose intrigues and whose vice were not suited to the prying eyes of a blackmailing concierge. The tenants came and went, but the lack of permanency was compensated by the price of the rent which the proprietor was able to demand for so discreet a house. At one time there was on the top floor a dark little man of Greek and English descent, who wore five bracelets on his wrist, carried a malacca stick, an Italian passport, and spent his time at questionable cafés in the quarter. Beneath him on the second floor lived Lady Connie Cheviott, a thin, white young Englishwoman, daughter of an earl, with dyed red hair and tired, opal eyes set in a chiseled, thin hard face. And last of all, on the first floor, just over the Apothecary, came Fannie Sackville—boisterous, loud, good-natured Fannie. People said, "Have you seen the absurd, ramshackle house where Fannie has moved?" Because everyone in Europe who was anyone knew Fannie. She was a sort of queen in the cosmopolitan, shabby, slightly tarnished world that moved

through the corridors of Ciro's and the Ritz and went always in season from Le Touquet to Deauville, to Biarritz, to Monte Carlo, to the Lido, to Paris, and back again over the same round. Fannie was the friend of grand duchesses and exiled kings, of demi-mondaines and soap manufacturers, bankrupt and bogus noblemen, millionaires and gigolos. Hers was a world in which everyone was so rich or so poor that money had no value. Most of the ladies had had their faces lifted. And it was a world that glittered a good deal. There seemed to be a great deal more in it than there actually was.

Some said that Fannie was English in origin and some that she was Irish, but a few people, a very few, knew fragments of her career which if pieced together showed an exciting and adventurous progress by the rocky road of burlesque, vaudeville, the theatre, comic opera and matrimony that began in Little Rock, Arkansas, and reached its peak in the house on the Rue Jacquinot. Fannie never troubled to clear up certain phases of the rocky and somewhat unhappy past upon which she had no desire ever to touch, and mystery, she knew, had its value. To her it was worth as much

as Zizi's title of Grand Duke was to him. There had been at least two husbands, one a sort of super-confidence man who called himself an investment broker, and the other was the Honorable Cecil Thorndyke, who had married her in London. Both had long since vanished from the horizon, one into an American penitentiary and the other into a British madhouse. Her name, Fannie Sackville, had to do with nothing save Fannie's own powers of invention. She had used it on the occasion of her solitary appearance in opera in the rôle of *Maddalena* at some third-rate watering-place in the Black Forest. Long ago she had lost any pretensions to a singing voice. The voice with which she spoke was coarse and metallic, the voice of one who had always lived hard and loudly and had drunk a good deal. One day Fannie was rich and the next she had nothing but debts, yet so great was her fame that there were dressmakers and restaurateurs who considered it good advertising to clothe and feed Fannie without any hope of payment. She always brought in her train dukes and princesses with names that had been glorious a century or two before and (what was of much greater interest to tradesmen) millionaires

in chocolate, perfume or soap who brought their mistresses. If the millionaire happened to be American, he had, of course, married his mistress.

Fannie's gifts were many. She was kind-hearted when the circumstances were not too exacting, generous, for she had no sense of money, witty, and amusing. But the greatest of her gifts and the one which brought her success and carried her through the valleys of misfortune was an immense and overflowing vitality. So great was her zest for life that she had enough left over to give a semblance of life and a sparkle of gaiety to the tired, despairing, bored world over which she reigned. For at least ten years, since the beginning of the decay of European society, Fannie had been supplying vitality and entertainment to a whole ruined world. She supplied it now in Rome, now in Venice, now on the Riviera, now at Deauville, but most of all in Paris, for Paris was the capital of her strange mad kingdom.

At fifty-five Fannie—the indefatigable Fannie who was always the life of the party—had begun to feel tired. There were days when she wanted passionately to lie in bed dozing and eating chocolates and reading cheap novels as she had done in

the far-off palmy days of her too exciting youth. But for Fannie there was no rest. She knew that if she rested even for a day, people would begin to forget her, and if people forgot her she would be faced only by poverty and old age. In her world people thought only of themselves, living in a morbid terror of boredom. They worked at having a good time and so nothing that they did gave them any pleasure. It was Fannie who saved them the work by planning everything. If she came to bore them, her kingdom would cast her out as other kingdoms had done to Zizi and Fifi and the other exiled kings and dukes and princes of her circle. But without a kingdom Fannie would, unlike Zizi and Fifi, have no title filled with glamour of the long past to support her. It would simply be the end. And so each day, like a sick and weary trooper, she had to forget that she was old and sometimes suffered from rheumatism, and, rising wearily, she would paint her face and touch up her hair and do the agonizing exercises which kept her figure slender enough to wring free gowns from great dressmakers. And a little later in the day two beady eyes set in a mass of tangled black hair would see

her passing through the evil-smelling hallway, setting out to organize dinners and fêtes and expeditions to divert her wan, tired kingdom.

The full sense of her great weariness swept over her for the first time on the day she moved into the tall ancient house in the Rue Jacquinot. She was aware that something in the atmosphere of the place, perhaps the ancient musty smell of a house that was too old and should have been pulled down long ago, oppressed her spirit. But even after the trouble and confusion of moving there was no rest for her. She lay down for a few moments and then had a bath and dressed and went out to dinner at Armenonville and then on to hear the niggers sing at Hinky-Dink's. It was dawn when she returned and the Apothecary was already on the pavement engaged in taking down his clumsy shutters and washing the pavement. It was the first time she had ever seen him out of his black hole, and the sight of his ancient bent figure and dirty beard and beady, malicious eyes gave her a fright. She told herself that it was because she was tired and because her vitality was frightfully low at that hour of the morning.

But the image remained fixed in her memory. It was a black, bent, dirty, crooked image with an aura of evil, and it was the eyes which she remembered best. They were beady, red-rimmed, and filled with malice. They came to her sometimes in the midst of the gayest evenings when she sat telling risqué stories at the Ritz or the Ambassadeurs with a grand duke on her right and an automobile king on her left. She never saw him again in the light of day, but only his eyes peering out from the darkness of his cave. It seemed to her that the eyes knew all the long history which she had managed to forget. Sometimes when she was very tired she fancied that the eyes were accusing her of things which no one but herself could possibly have known.

But she thought, "This is nonsense. I must not . . . I dare not . . . let my nerves get the better of me. I, who have never had a nerve in my body. Truly, I am strong as an ox."

When the image would not go away, she tried to destroy it by jesting at it. She had a way—the way of people who live by their wits—of turning adversity to jest and so to capital, and thus she sought to make capital of the dirty little

Apothecary. When people asked her about the ancient and picturesque house in which she had taken a flat, she described it with a great deal of gusto and noisy wit, always adding, "But the best of all is the old man, an apothecary, who lives in the cellar. He's a real character. He's been there forever, ever since the house was built. Already he's three centuries old."

But the very mention of him had, just the same, a way of bringing with it a sickening cloud of depression, which she would shake off with her great vitality like a dog shaking water from his coat. In Fannie's consciousness the Apothecary came presently to occupy a place like that of the corpse at an Egyptian banquet.

But among the grand dukes and harlots, profiteers and gigolos, the Apothecary came to be a character. People who had never seen him spoke of him as Fannie's Apothecary. Sometimes it seemed that he, too, was present at the dinners at the Ritz or Ciro's.

2

At times when Fannie sat before her mirror painting her sagging face, her hand would pause

and, fascinated by her own reflection, she would find herself thinking, "That thing in the mirror is Fannie Sackville—that battered, decaying, tired old woman who was born Tessie Dunker, of Little Rock, Arkansas." And one by one all her past, her vices, her betrayals, her sins, her extravagances, her follies, would have a way of rising up out of the funeral wrappings of forty years and returning to her in a horrid, fascinating procession. It was as if she saw them all for the first time, for she never thought about herself one way or another and it was only when she was tired that such things happened.

But in the end she would always dab on a trifle more rouge, and rise briskly from her dressing-table saying to herself, "After all, I *am* Fannie Sackville. Everybody has heard of me. My friends are the Flower of Europe, the cream of Old World nobility." And to quiet her nerves she would recite to herself such names as the Grand Duke's and Lady Connie Cheviott's and the Princesse de Vignes' and the Duke of Sebastiola's. . . . The Flower of Europe was a phrase which consoled her. She thought of it more and more frequently, because it kept her from seeing the eyes of the

Apothecary. Tessie Dunker of Little Rock seemed a long way off, quite lost in a haze of unreality.

3

And then one night she had a stroke of luck. Entering the bar of Ciro's she caught a sudden glimpse of a dark young face. It troubled her for a moment until that amazing memory which had so much to do with her success, placed it. She knew suddenly, in a quick flash. It was Tony Sanders, grandson of Old Burgess Sanders who had that affair with Merna Leavitt, last of the spear carriers. Tony, her memory told her, was rich, perhaps too idle, something of a ne'er-do-well, a sportsman, an excellent dancer. Her first thought was that he was handsome and attractive and almost at once she knew that she had a use for him. Lately she had come to pounce upon anything that was young and not tired. She could feed his youth to her tired world. There were women with tired, sagging faces who would adore him.

She did not think it out very clearly. She existed by instincts and flashes of intuition, and a flash now told her that he was valuable.

So sweeping forward royally, with all her jewels a-glitter, she went up to him, crying out in the hoarse hearty voice that concealed so much weariness, "Why, Tony Sanders! Why didn't you let me know you were in Paris!"

The boy looked at her for a moment puzzled, and then said quite casually, "Oh, hello, Fannie," and took her hand.

Really they knew each other scarcely at all, but with Fannie one always used first names. At once she said, "I'm dining with the Duke of Sebastiola's party. You must join us." Then she mentioned the names, the high-sounding, once splendorous names of dukes, princes, and marquises who were in the party. There were also a gentleman of dubious repute suspected of having been a spy during the war, a decayed demi-mondaine married to her lover, and a man who had made a fortune out of patented cheese. These she neglected to mention, although she did touch lightly upon the fact that a movie actress of a certain notoriety was also a guest. She was a trifle cautious because she believed that Tony knew his Europe.

"But I can't," said Tony. "You see, I'm dining with a friend of mine, a girl. I'm showing her

the sights of Paris. She hasn't been here since she was twelve."

The bright, hard look glittered in Fannie's eyes. "Why, bring her, of course. I'm sure we can arrange it."

Tony asked her if she would join him in a cocktail and then murmured that he was afraid the plan wouldn't work. He even blushed a little. "You see, I don't think she'd be at home at such a party. She's only twenty . . . a *jeune fille*."

"There's no such thing."

"Perhaps not." He did not seem inclined to argue the point.

For a moment something—perhaps the phrase "only twenty" or the words *jeune fille*—gave her a bad turn. She saw, too, that he *did* know his world and that the Flower of Europe had failed to impress him. Her figure wilted a little, and then recovering herself quickly, she said, "I understand. Well, you must join us soon at another party. Where are you staying?"

He wrote his address on a card and she in turn gave him the address of the house in the Rue Jacquinot. "You must come and see me some day. Just ring me up. I live in the most fascinating

[house.

house. No concierge. In the basement there's only an apothecary, but don't disturb him when you come in. He's a little cracked. I must tell you about him sometime. I must go now. Zizi is calling me."

With a trill of bright professional laughter she crossed the bar to where the Grand Duke stood beckoning to her. Zizi was a Grand Duke whom Tessie Dunker called by a pet name. Tony, looking after her, saw her surrounded and swallowed up and then appear again at a table filled with faces which made him utter a sound of disgust and ask the barman for another martini.

At the same moment the girl he had been awaiting came through the revolving door. She seemed to have been wafted in by a fresh breeze out of the Rue Daunou and for a moment she stood in the doorway a little dazzled by the glitter of lights. She was tall and blonde and young. Her eyes were blue and had a look of wonder in them as if she were always being surprised by the world. Yet there was a curious air of self-confidence and dignity about her. Against the gilt and glass she seemed shockingly fresh and young. The hard light did not shatter her smooth face into wrinkles

and hard angles. When she saw Tony she dismissed the maid who had come with her and moved forward to meet him.

There are at Ciro's two rooms. One is right and one is wrong. The right room is crowded with the fashionable, the notorious, the freakish, the bankrupt. It is small and people sit huddled back to back in order to squeeze into it. There are people who will not be seen at Ciro's unless they can be in the right room. The wrong room is comfortably filled with nonentities. Whole careers have been ruined by being seen in the wrong room.

Tony, like the Duke of Sebastiola, had a table in the right room. Tony's table was for two and the Duke of Sebastiola's was the largest and most resplendent in the room, but Fannie had neglected to tell Tony that the flowers and the wines and the food were paid for by the wife of the patent cheese millionaire. Fannie had arranged it. The Duke of Sebastiola was giving a dinner in honor of the wife of the cheese merchant. At least, so it would read in tomorrow's *Herald*.

The two tables were near to each other and Fannie kept watching the young people as if they

had for her a special fascination. There was something spidery in her behavior. She pointed them out to the Duke of Sebastiola, a lean, sallow man, with a tiny mustache and long collapsible hands. He took a great interest in them.

"They are very young and fresh," he said. "I wonder how long they'll continue to be so? You must arrange to have me meet the girl, Fannie. She is adorable."

Before Tony and the girl left, Fannie swept to their table.

"Tony dear," she said. "I'm giving a party on Saturday. You must come."

Again he refused, but he introduced the girl. Her name was Anne Masterson, and Fannie's brain at once set to work.

"What a lovely name, my dear! Are you a relation of the Westbury Mastersons?"

"Yes," said the girl; "Tom Masterson is my uncle."

"Of course I know them all well," said Fannie, with an irresistible cordiality. "It does make a difference, doesn't it? Perhaps you can come to my party."

"She can't," said Tony. "We're going to the same dinner."

For the first time Fannie's claws showed ever so little. She gave the boy a look which said, "You needn't try to oppose me. You may regret it. Don't forget who I am."

Then with a sweet smile she said, "Well, another time, perhaps." And bidding them goodnight she went back to join the princes and demimondaines who were going on to another "party."

When she had gone the girl said to Tony, "Why did you do that? We aren't going to any dinner."

"Yes. You're dining with me."

"You said you had an engagement."

"I haven't any longer."

"Are you trying to protect me?" She stressed the word "protect" with a shadow of mockery.

"Oh, I'm not afraid that any of them will try to ruin you. They're much too feeble for that. At least they won't ruin you in the way you read about in the newspapers."

"I'm not a child, Tony. I'd like to know her. I've heard about her always."

"There's nothing very bad about Fannie. She's the best of the lot. The trouble is that she's never

done anything really wicked. It's all such nonsense."

"You're being a prig."

"Perhaps." Again he did not argue the point. It was a way he had which at once fascinated and exasperated the girl. He said he simply thought that crowd silly and worthless and not very savory.

There was a silence and presently Anne said, "I feel sorry for her."

"For who?"

"For Fannie Sackville."

Tony laughed. "For Fannie Sackville! Great heavens, why?"

"She's old and tired."

"Why, Fannie's never been tired in her life. She daren't risk being tired."

"I think that's what is the matter."

Again a silence and Tony asked with a smile, "Are you disappointed in her?"

"I don't know. I'd never thought about her. I suppose I expected a beautiful and fascinating adventuress."

"She wanted us to join her party."

"Why didn't you?"

"I've told you why."

"Listen to me, Tony. I can look out for myself. I don't want to be protected."

"I'm sorry I'm giving you a boring evening."

She leaned across the table and, smiling, touched his hand. "You know that's not true. Don't be a spoiled child."

4

As Fannie left the restaurant she was talking and laughing boisterously. She was being the life of the party. And she was thinking, "Masterson—Anne Masterson—niece of Tom Masterson. Why, she must be John Masterson's daughter."

John Masterson was worth twenty millions and the girl had no mother. And she was young and beautiful . . . young . . . young . . . young. If she married someone picked out by Fannie, someone who needed money, then she could borrow money. Perhaps she was just the one for Sebastiola. In any case, she was beautiful and young . . . young.

5

Unlike Henry James' Daisy Miller, Anne Masterson had no scheming, vulgar mother. Instead,

she was attended by a refined and desiccated spinster called Miss Van Siden, who for thirty years had supported herself by acting as companion and chaperone to young girls traveling abroad. The grandfather of Miss Van Siden had not been like Anne Masterson's grandfather, a steel puddler who amassed millions; he had been a gentleman of old New York living in a red brick house in Washington Square upon the rents of the property about him that had once been the Van Siden farm, and even in the Seventies was covered already with shops and lodging-houses. Even Miss Van Siden could remember as a little girl having seen the Duke of Middelbottom (grandfather of Lady Connie Cheviott, who lived above the Apothecary) when he came to stay with her grandfather. She remembered, too, the visit of the Prince de Venterollo, cousin of the Duke of Sebastiola. Miss Van Siden was proud of her grandfather and of her name, because these were the only things left her in which she might honestly take pride. There was no longer any Van Siden money, no longer any pictures, nor a house in Washington Square, and no dukes visited the Van Sidens. She often spoke of her grandfather to console herself for her

poverty, her unmarried state (a kind of disgrace with her generation), and the neglect of friends who had come to forget her as she slipped down in the world. For Miss Van Siden, like poor Daisy Miller, was a romantic. Titles impressed her, quite swamping her in their glamour. She was more of a romantic than Fannie Sackville, because life had trained Fannie to be a realist and even in the moments when Fannie reassured herself by thinking of the Flower of Europe she was aware in her deepest heart that the flower was somewhat bedraggled and gone to seed. But, then, Miss Van Siden was herself in a way like the Flower of Europe. She fed upon the past because the present was unbearable and there seemed to be no future. In a way Miss Van Siden and the Flower were simply marking time until the end.

So when Miss Van Siden heard Tony Sanders lightly and in his hard youthful way jeer at names which had been sacred to her grandfather, it made her feel a little sick. It was almost as if Tony insulted her own grandfather. Even when he told her that he knew many of them quite well and that the lot of them together were not worth much to the world, she did not believe him. She only

set him down as boisterous and vulgar and ill-bred. That was one of Miss Van Siden's defenses against a world which she could not understand and which she abhorred. Between herself and Tony there was a sort of implacable hatred and scorn, and because she knew that he was in love with Anne Masterson she did everything in her power to separate them. It was because of Miss Van Siden that Tony chose to meet Anne at Ciro's instead of going to the Crillon to fetch her. Against him Miss Van Siden kept up a steady, relentless campaign of hints and insinuations. She alluded delicately to his vulgarity, his bad taste, his ungentlemanly exuberance, his wildness. The thin cords of her withered neck stood out in indignation when Anne, watching her poor flustered face and knowing that everything in the world was against poor Miss Van Siden and everything in the world was on the side of herself and Tony, defended him with the cruel assurance of youth.

The oddest thing of all was that Fannie Sackville and Miss Van Siden knew each other. It was an acquaintance, but never a friendship, for a woman like Fannie, even in her younger days, could never have been anything but a thing of horror to Miss

Van Siden. Yet there had been a time fifteen years earlier when Miss Van Siden, encountering Fannie in the country in England, had accepted her as the Honorable Mrs. Cecil Thorndyke. Fifteen years had passed since the paths of the two women crossed and in those fifteen years it was difficult to say which life had been the more barren or which woman the more haggard and weary. Fannie suffered from an excess of gaiety that was no longer gaiety but only a sort of tiresome hardship, and Miss Van Siden was weary from a life which never belonged to herself but to others fresher, younger, gayer, stronger than herself. The two women were born to hate each other and in any struggle the simple Miss Van Siden was certain to be a dupe for a sharp-witted creature like Fannie.

So when Anne Masterson came in one afternoon from the races at Auteuil, where she had been with Tony, to say that Fannie Sackville was giving a dinner in her honor, Miss Van Siden looked at her with a kind of horror and said with the sweet smile of a paid chaperone who is never certain how far she may go without losing her post, "Oh, but you can't do that, my dear! You can't be seen in public with a woman like Mrs. Thorndyke (she

refused to call Fannie by the name Fannie had chosen for herself). Your father wouldn't think of it!"

And Anne, who seemed for some reason flushed and angry, said, "It's not to be in a restaurant. It's to be in her own house and she's invited the most charming and respectable people. I'm not a child, Miss Van Siden."

"Is young Mr. Sanders going with you?"

"No."

There was a silence and Miss Van Siden said sweetly, "I thought Mr. Sanders was coming back to tea."

"He's not coming. We quarreled."

A light came into Miss Van Siden's eyes and she turned away, lest Anne should see it. "That's too bad," she said falsely.

Anne flung down her silver fox. "I'm tired of Tony's moral tone. He's always saying I mustn't do this or that. I mustn't be friendly with so-and-so, 'They're not the right sort for a girl like you.'" She turned abruptly. "I'm not a child. I didn't come over here to get a husband and I didn't come to spend my time in the Louvre like a school-girl. I did all that when I was twelve. I

came over to see Europe and have a good time, and Fannie Sackville's crowd is very much a part of Europe. They're one of the sights of our time. It's like going to see the ruins of the Coliseum. Besides, plenty of people would be only too flattered to be invited by Fannie Sackville. She's very kind to me, poor old thing, and I can't slap her in the face for that. Besides, I feel sorry for her." She wanted to say, "And I feel sorry for you, too, who are so afraid of everything."

Miss Van Siden listened in silence, having decided perhaps from long experience that it was useless to argue with a headstrong young girl fresh from a quarrel with her lover. She only said, "Just the same, I'm against your going."

Anne only looked at her scornfully and Miss Van Siden poured herself a cup of weak tea. It gave her an odd, unsteady feeling to find herself suddenly ranged side by side with the exuberant Tony who had no respect for great names. Miss Van Siden was no matchmaker. On the contrary, there lay deep down in her withered heart a bitter envy for creatures as young and radiant as Anne Masterson. She hated all these young girls whom she was hired to protect by the shadow of respec-

tability. She wanted, despite her knowledge that it was a wicked thing, to see all other women turn from fresh young girls into withered copies of herself. The idea made her own condition a less dreary and lonely one. In a strange and terrifying fashion her heart leapt at the knowledge that Anne had quarreled with Tony. But she was ashamed, too.

6

On the other side of the wall Fannie Sackville had been spinning her web in a kind of desperation. Lately she had noticed that her friends laughed less heartily at her sallies and that they sometimes appeared to look upon her plans of entertainment with indifference and even boredom. For they, too, were growing older. One by one the women who had been famous beauties were collapsing into old age. They no longer found amusing the jokes she made of the house in which she lived and of the Apothecary who occupied the basement. It was as if they sensed her weariness finding them out and adding weight to their own. And the damp, mysterious Apothecary seemed in a strange way to go about with her, imposing him-

self like a dreary fog upon all the parties. He had ceased any longer to be an eccentric, perhaps overstrained, joke. He came slowly to rise up before them all—the grand dukes and cheese merchants, the marquises and the demi-mondaines—in a kind of horrible reality.

So Fannie redoubled her efforts to capture Anne Masterson. At the races she crossed the paddock to speak to her. She smiled and waved to her in restaurants. She sent flowers to the Crillon where Anne was staying. And she knew that the girl was flattered because, in spite of everything, it meant something to have even a waning Fannie Sackville notice you.

In the back of her plans was Toto, the Duke of Sebastiola. This was the tall, sallow man of forty-three, the last of his race, who lived precariously in the midst of Fannie's kingdom. He, like Miss Van Siden, lived upon the glory of the past because the present was unbearable and there was no future. He dressed in a dapper Latin fashion with gaiters that were too yellow and waistcoats that were too bright and jackets that were too pinched at the waist. In some restaurants he was, like Fannie, able to eat without paying because

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the proprietor recognized his value in attracting tourists and buyers. He had neither brain nor wit and his vitality had long ago sunk to a low ebb from which it had never risen to cover the rocks of adversity. He made a great show of being a gallant toward all women, but in reality he had nothing to do with them and from feebleness lived quite a moral life. Work he could not consider, for no Sebastiola had ever worked at constructing anything. From the twelfth to the nineteenth century the family had lived by pilfering and destruction and petty warfare in troubled Italy, and in its decline it had lived upon the labor of peasants on estates won by a *condittiere* ancestor. By the time the present Duke came of age there were no longer even any estates. Since he could not break with so distinguished and honorable a tradition he played a great deal of bridge and sometimes made designs for a great dressmaker who knew the value of his name with the cocottes and recently rich. He had two great assets—a glorious name and a thin, cruel face.

He had marked Anne Masterson from the moment Fannie crossed the garish "right room" at Ciro's to speak to her. He told Fannie that he

must meet the girl and a little later when he and Fannie had come to understand each other better, he let her know that he could imagine marrying such a girl and that if he married her or someone like her who had a large fortune, he would see to it (when the Italian law gave him control of her money) that Fannie shouldn't suffer for having helped him.

Being a shrewd woman with a long hard life behind her, Fannie began to take stock of the elements which opposed her. She knew that Tony Sanders did not like her and that he knew far too much of the world to be dazzled by her, but she knew, too, that she must pretend complete ignorance of all such knowledge. She must always be pleasant and outwardly as candid as a fresh breeze. The girl must believe that she was one of Tony's oldest friends.

So at the races when Tony and Anne quarreled, she crossed the paddock and spoke to Tony as if she had known him as a child on her knee. She flattered the girl and said presently, "I'm going to have a party soon. I think I'll give it in your honor. You must meet people and learn your way about."

She did not name any day lest Tony, regarding her blackly, should claim an earlier engagement for them both. "I'll write you, my dear, and fix the day soon."

And Anne, being irritated at Tony at that moment, said quickly, "I'd love to come. I'll speak to Miss Van Siden about it."

At this Fannie's large face beamed. "Not Miss Lavinia Van Siden! Not really! Why, we know each other well. We used to stay at the Duke of Middelbottom's every autumn. . . . I mean the old Duke, dear Connie Cheviott's grandfather. Lavinia will understand. I'll write her a note explaining that I'm having the Flower of Europe to meet you."

And suddenly Fannie was gone again, lost in the crowd of mannequins, trainers, millionaires, jockeys and concierges that filled the paddock. The quarrel began in earnest.

Tony's dark face grew angry. "You're not really going to a party given by that old hag!"

And into Anne's blue eyes there came a calm, clear, dangerous look which Tony knew well. "Of course, I'm going. Why shouldn't I? That's what I came to Europe for. I think you're a plain snob."

Again Tony did not argue. He only said, "Perhaps I am," with a certain satisfaction.

It grew worse and worse and at last Tony said wildly, "If you prefer that set of has-beens to my company, maybe it's better that I retire from the field altogether. I'm sure you'll have no difficulty finding a husband among them. Any of 'em would be only too glad to marry you."

"Perhaps you're right. Certainly I don't want to marry a man who treats me as a half-witted child. Besides, if they're all so terrible how do you come to know them so well?"

Tony answered a second time with the same quiet satisfaction. "With a man it's different. A man can look out for himself."

It was quite the wrong argument. Anne looked at him with fury. "That's what all men say. But it isn't different any more. If you don't know that, we'd better part now. Will you get me a taxicab?"

Yet she knew somehow that Tony was right. He could take or leave the Flower of Europe without harm. It was that which angered her most.

7

But Fannie was much too clever to risk a meeting with Miss Van Siden. When she had said in the paddock, "I *must* see her," she meant, "I must *not* see her," and then retired to watch Anne and Tony from a distance, knowing that she had caused them to quarrel. She was a sentimental woman and once she would have regretted what she had done, but now she had to think of herself. The time was growing short and it was her own game she had to play.

She *did* know Miss Van Siden and she knew exactly the vulnerable spot in the shabby old spinster. So on the morning after the races, with the eyes of the Apothecary haunting her more dreadfully than usual, she wrote a note and sent flowers to Miss Van Siden.

They arrived at the Crillon in the evening after dinner while Anne sat reading in a corner of the room and Miss Van Siden wrote one of her endless letters in a fine Victorian hand to an obscure cousin who lived up the Hudson. Miss Van Siden was aware that Anne had been weeping

and in her withered heart there were short quick spasms of pleasure which she tried shamefully to strangle. She knew that the tears had to do with Tony and that was enough to give her satisfaction.

Anne had been weeping because the hotel room was dreary, with only the bloodless Miss Van Siden in it for companionship, and because of a note which lay concealed in the pages of her book. It read simply, "I'm sorry if I was rude yesterday. I've been thinking it over and have come to the conclusion that perhaps you're right. We'd better not see each other again. Of course you won't want to go to the theatre with me, so I'm sending the tickets in case you want to take Miss Van Siden in my place. I hope you'll enjoy yourself at Fannie's party. But, as you say, times have changed, and in these days it is the women who always know best. They seem convinced that they are able to change even God and Nature's plans. I hope you'll enjoy the rest of your stay in Paris. Certainly Fannie can show you things I couldn't and wouldn't.—*Tony.*"

She wept because she thought she had lost him and because the letter was shrewdly written to

give her as much regret as possible. Did he imagine that she could even think of sitting in a hot, smelly, airless French theatre with Miss Van Siden at her side instead of him? She wept, too, because half an hour earlier she had humbled her pride and sent a message to him at his hotel, only to receive the answer that he had gone away. They did not know where, perhaps to Deauville. She wept, too, because Tony had done what she thought he never would do. He had taken her at her word and given her up. She felt very sorry for herself. Her whole trip to Europe had been ruined because Tony chose to be pig-headed. And now there was nothing to do about it. She did not even know where he was. She had better not have come to Paris at all.

And presently she began to grow angry once more because Tony had done what she never thought he would do and because her own vanity was wounded. Anger at Tony helped to heal these wounds.

Then the bell rang and a boy brought a note and some flowers. Anne watched Miss Van Siden read the note slowly, once and then again, and she watched her expression soften and a light come

into the dull near-sighted eyes. Anne knew the look. It came into the eyes of Miss Van Siden at the mention of royalty.

It was the poison of Fannie doing its work.

Miss Van Siden turned in her gilt chair and took off her pince-nez. "It's from the Honorable Mrs. Thorndyke," she said, "asking you to dinner. Was this the dinner Tony objected to?" Anne noticed that Miss Van Siden had been moved by something in the letter. Mrs. Thorndyke had become the Honorable Mrs. Thorndyke.

"Yes."

"Tony is foolish. He's a wild, nonsensical boy without respect." (In the withered heart a flame of delight leapt up. Tony had been wrong, after all, and she would no longer have to be on his side. Perhaps Anne would be an old maid too.)

"That's what I told him," said Anne.

"It's a very distinguished party," continued Miss Van Siden, turning the mauve pages of Fannie's innocent note. "I don't like the Honorable Mrs. Thorndyke. She's not the sort I was taught to admire. But certainly the people she mentions are the very best. There's even the Grand Duke

Augustus. I should think it quite proper, even distinguished."

(New little plans began to squirm and stir in Miss Van Siden's nineteenth-century brain. Anne might marry a great title.)

She put on her pince-nez and began to read the note for a third time, peering closely at the mauve paper. "She writes that she's asked Lady Connie Cheviott (that's the daughter of the Duke of Middelbottom I spoke about the other day) and the Duke of Sebastiola (his cousin, dear, once visited my grandfather) and the Princesse de Vignes and the Grand Duke and Mrs. Brodman." Turning, she looked over the top of her pince-nez. "I've never heard of Mrs. Brodman, but she must be all right to be included in such a party. As the Honorable Mrs. Thorndyke says, they represent the Flower of Europe."

With a flush of pride Miss Van Siden read the last drop of Fannie's poison. " 'Of course,' Mrs. Thorndyke writes, 'you know all these people well. There's no need of telling you who they are.' "

It was that line which won the struggle for

Fannie. Miss Van Siden said brightly, "Would you like to go, my dear?"

"Yes," said Anne in a wave of rage at Tony, at Miss Van Siden, and at all the world, "I've meant to all along."

8

A week before Fannie's dinner party, the Apothecary disappeared. When Fannie came down at noon one day, his damp, dirty little shop was closed and blind. The shutters were still up and the pavement unwashed. There were no black peering eyes to look out at her as she passed the door. The only sign of life was the sound of the wretched black cat crying inside the closed door.

Fannie's heart leapt at the sight. She had come to the superstitious belief that if only she could escape those eyes everything would be all right and she would feel as gay and tireless as ever. Perhaps, she thought, he had gone for good. And that night at the Ambassadeurs she announced that her friend the Apothecary had disappeared. She was her old self once more. She was the life of the party, carrying it all on her own shoulders, and no one was bored.

The next day the shop of the Apothecary remained closed and the next day and the next. On the day of the dinner Fannie asked the *femme de ménage* who cleaned the stairs what had become of him.

"He has probably gone off to the country," said the woman. "He has done it before."

(Perhaps, thought Fannie, he has gone for good and then I shan't have to move out.) Because of late Fannie had considered fleeing the house and the Apothecary forever.

Fannie was the most colossal of gamblers and, like all gamblers, she was an optimist, living always in the expectancy that something would turn up. Since the day more than thirty years earlier when she had run away from Little Rock with a traveling salesman who failed to marry her (a fact known to none but Fannie) her life had been one colossal game of baccara. Sometimes the cards turned against her and sometimes for months and years she kept winning and winning, until suddenly one day she would lose the whole bank in a single venture and have to begin all over again. She had the wild, nervous superstitions of a gambler, and she now took the disappearance of the

Apothecary as the beginning of a new and better turn in the wheel of her fortunes. While he had stood there in his shop looking over her shoulder while she played her game, everything had gone wrong. She had grown old and weary. She had lost money. She had come for the sixth time close to bankruptcy, and bankruptcy at fifty-five was not so simple an affair as it had been at thirty.

But all that was changed now. She was going to win at last, and when she won, Sebastiola would lay aside something out of Anne Masterson's fortune for her (Fannie's) old age. She knew she was going to win on the next card. She had that odd clairvoyant sense of excitement which overcomes a gambler the second before a great coup.

9

Night came and presently half-past nine. Fannie, bathing and dressing and making up her face, sang to herself snatches of the old songs she had sung twenty years earlier in the music halls in Australia. The apartment looked well all lighted by tall wax candles bought from the religious shop opposite Saint Sulpice. The guests began to ar-

[arrive,

rive, stumbling along the narrow, dimly lighted stairway worn for centuries by the feet of lords and ladies, pimps and prostitutes. Sebastiola arrived first, looking tired, sallow and distinguished. He exchanged a look with Fannie that was bright and almost hysterical, as if he, too, felt himself on the verge of a colossal change of fortune. Then the daughter of the Duke of Middelbottom, Lady Connie Cheviott, came down from upstairs, looking very weary but very fascinating, with her short dyed red hair, her marvelous white skin and the weary eyes of a woman of sixty. "The war," people used to say at Noxham on Tow, the seat of her father, the Duke, "did poor Connie in." After her arrived one of the guests whom Fannie had neglected to mention in her note to Miss Van Siden. He was a tall, emaciated, transparent young man born in that part of Chicago known as the Loop, who had an immense success in Paris because he was an expert dancer of the Charleston. He was known as Jimmy Harris and he was rather like a ghost. He carried in his wallet a soiled card announcing his membership in the National Association of Vaudeville Artists. His trousers were cut a trifle too full and his jacket a trifle too

pinched. His hair glistened with ungents like the patent-leather of his shoes.

And then the Princesse de Vignes, a big, handsome woman with shining black hair and a large evil mouth. Where her money came from no one knew, but she was extremely well known and always seen everywhere. She got her clothes free from the dressmaking establishment that employed Sebastiola as a part-time designer. And after her the "extraordinary Mrs. Brodman," a heavy, sardonic Jewess of forty-five who in third marriage was wife of an international banker. She was fabulously rich and her diamonds and emeralds were the only real ones in the room. On her wrist she wore the famous octagonal emerald from the collection of the Maharajah of Ganore.

And then the Grand Duke who once owned estates larger than Texas and now lived largely by borrowing money in lots of fifty francs from an illegitimate daughter who earned her living by running a Concert Russe. His meals cost him nothing, for he was always being invited by people like Fannie and Mrs. Brodman. He was always everywhere in season and went from gala to gala, always surrounded by the same crowd.

And after him, the Baroness Trautmann, a woman of fifty who was not a baroness at all but a once famous beauty who in five marriages had managed to amass a large fortune. Her face had been renewed, not too well, for the operation left her mouth quite puckered, as if she were always whistling to herself. And then the Marquis de Gotha, a silly fellow whose sinister face belied the dimness of his wits; and after him a young man called Senff, very rich and quite infantile, who lived from day to day on the glory of seeing his name appear in the social columns of the *Herald* and the *Daily Mail* surrounded or rather preceded by those of the Grand Duke, Sebastiola, Lady Connie, Fannie and others. The account of any party in Fannie's set was likely to end with the simple phrase "and Mr. Senff." He was a young man who was renowned for his taste.

And last of all came Anne Masterson. She wore a simple gown of white, becoming to her blonde hair, and as she came into the room there was a perceptible heightening of interest, as if among all the jewels, real and false, and all the reputations, insipid or bad, she possessed the only thing that was of value to them all. It was like a breeze

stirring the surface of a field of wheat that was overripe and beginning to fall.

When the Duke of Sebastiola kissed her ringless hand, he held it for a moment too long and looked at her out of his weary, handsome eyes with a look so warm, so tender and so admiring that her vanity was touched. Tony, with his rough half-proprietary way, was incapable of such a gesture. It did not occur to her that this was what Tony called scornfully the professional manner of Latin men. Standing rather shyly beneath the crystal chandelier in the center of Fannie's room, she was like a tall lily freshly brought in from the garden.

Fannie, watching her with the secret part of her brain which was always occupied with watching, thought with a strange and unaccustomed burst of pride, "Old Europe no longer produces anything so perfect as this—such beauty, such quiet charm, such perfect clothes, a figure so slim, such beautiful feet and ankles." She fancied that in the breast of Toto Sebastiola something had been aroused that was more profound than his perpetual craving for money. To a group so experienced and so weary Anne Masterson had a freshness and a vir-

ginity which was the only exciting thing left in the world.

The guests were seated about the table in the order of their rank, for Fannie knew about such things. As she seated herself, all her false diamonds glittered and threw off beams of cold shattered light. She seemed a kind of firework done in cold and non-igniting fire. In the back of her brain she thought again how far she had come from Little Rock and that it was an exciting world. For a moment she was no longer weary. Her luck had begun to change. The Apothecary was gone.

Anne, seated between the Grand Duke and Sebastiola, was a little frightened and glad she had come. She was not awed, like Fannie and Miss Van Siden, by the array of titles, but by the thing which awed her generation. She fancied that these people were wicked and sophisticated. It never occurred to her that some of them were sordid, like Lady Connie, or merely trivial, like Mr. Senff, or pitiful, like Mrs. Brodman, or merely ill and tired and hopeless, like the Grand Duke.

Mrs. Brodman, watching Anne out of her soft brown Jewish eyes, said sentimentally but with a

touch of malice, "You look, my dear, like a lily planted between a pair of ancient cactuses."

The dinner began in a bright hard burst of gaiety, the conversation flowing now in French, now in English, but mostly in English because English was now the *chic* language and because the Grand Duke preferred to speak it. The Princesse de Vignes even affected a slight American accent. There was white wine and red and at length champagne, quantities of it, all served by two men whom Fannie had in for the evening at forty francs apiece. (Forty francs, a dollar and a half. One could never do that in New York or London.) That was the reason why Paris happened to be the capital of Fannie's kingdom.

The Grand Duke had turned to Anne and in the dim light of the candles the sight of his face so close to hers gave her a shock. He looked ill and his face and head were shaped oddly like a skull. His skin was green-white and under his eyes there were dark shadows. He suffered from some disease that made him tremble. His hand shook as he raised his glass of champagne. As he talked to her, Anne was seized by a sickening uneasiness, as if she were talking to a man who was a little mad.

["Mademoiselle,"

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I drink to you as the only young person here. The rest of us are all a thousand years old . . . even Fannie, for all the noise she is making. We have all been dead a century or more."

He looked at Fannie, who, working her hardest to make the party a success, was shaking her diamonds and telling the Marquis de Gotha a questionable story on his favorite subject of perversion. She knew in that part of her brain which was always watching that the party had begun to sink. She saw that they were slipping back into a morass of weary boredom.

Anne, speaking uneasily, said to the Grand Duke, "I'm not really young. Girls in these days know everything."

"Age, my dear girl, has nothing to do with years or experience. One is young or one is not. Even age does not make one old if one is young. You are young," he added with a melancholy persistence. "You are at the beginning. The rest of us are at the end. Fannie tries to save us, but she can't. She, too, is at the end."

He went on talking with the same feverish intensity, about repentance and death, and what

came after death, and Anne, aware of her excitement over the strange group beneath Fannie's luster, could no longer understand him. She tried to answer him, and to keep up an intelligible conversation, but she found herself groping about in a cloud. There was no beginning and no end to what he said.

At the end of the table Fannie was talking and laughing too loudly. Near her the Princesse de Vignes was talking in a low voice to the old and mummy-like de Gotha. Sometimes in a brief stillness the rich Oriental voice of Mrs. Brodman was heard like the accompaniment of cellos to a symphony written for clarionets, recounting the tale of her pursuit of some priceless jewel or tapestry. She had a passion for rich colors and velvety, shining materials. Even these people about her were a kind of collection she had made as she might have collected objects of antiquity. The voice of Lady Connie was like the sound of one piece of copper struck against another.

Yet the singular enchantment seemed to grow and increase, flowing and ebbing in waves like a tremulous vapor. There was a sudden silence when nervously all of them seemed to be waiting

for something. And then slowly the enchantment appeared to grow tangible, at first vaguely, and then with a disturbing certainty. It was an enchantment that one could *smell.*

Sebastiola said to Anne, "Do you notice a strange smell?"

She could not be sure. Perhaps there was something.

"It's sickening." He looked at the others and he saw the lips of Mrs. Brodman saying, "Perhaps it's the drains."

Delicately he sniffed the air, and then Anne, too, became aware of the smell. It was a faint, ghostly odor, vaguely sweet and nauseating. It was a kind of fear that you could *smell.* She was aware that on her other side the hand of the Grand Duke was shaking violently.

Across the table, in the green eyes of Lady Connie Cheviott, there was a look of glittering malice. Of them all she alone had the air of remaining aloof. She might have been seated atop a glacier watching the rest of them with a weary distaste. She ate nothing and her long too-thin white arms rested on the table. Her chair was pushed back a little, as if she meant to rise and leave. In her

flat, lifeless English voice she was saying, "No, I do mean it. There are people whom I would gladly poison if I thought I shouldn't be discovered."

Mrs. Brodman, a little shocked, was saying, "You don't really mean that, Connie?" And an odd thing happened. There was in her speech the faint echo of a Yiddish-Cockney accent, as if she were slipping back to her beginnings.

"Yes, people who bore me. There ought to be no bores in the world."

It was the Grand Duke who answered her. He shook so violently that Anne was suddenly frightened. Now even his voice trembled.

"You don't know what you're saying, Connie. You're trying to be funny, but you're only childish."

The Duke's daughter continued in the same sinister, metallic voice, "Oh, I don't mean any harm. I should put them away quite gently—without pain—oh, quite. I shouldn't be brutal or violent."

Anne stopped eating and was aware that the champagne had gone to her head. She wanted to laugh or cry hysterically. The smell was nauseating her. She was aware, too, that a hand was pressing her own gently beneath the table. It was

a damp, chilly, lean, aristocratic hand which she knew belonged to the Duke of Sebastiola. For a moment she seemed unable to withdraw her own. She thought, wildly, "What has happened to my nerves? I must not scream."

She heard the others discussing in distant voices ways of putting out of the world people who annoyed them. They were making lists in a kind of futile proscription, naming people from the corridors of Ciro's and the Ritz. There were small ripples of macabre laughter. She wanted to speak in order not to seem conspicuous, but she knew that whatever she might say would sound young and fatuous. Two others at the table had fallen silent. The one was the Princesse de Vignes, who had gone quite white, and the other was the Grand Duke. He seemed stricken with a ghastly chill.

Fannie was saying, "I should like to poison the Apothecary."

"Oh," said Lady Connie, "but he's gone forever. He shan't bother us any more."

The sweets were served, but they remained untouched. Among the tulips and orchids (for which Fannie had not yet paid) the candles burned lower and lower. But no one ate anything. They

said that the rest of the dinner had been too good, or that they dared not eat sweets because of their figures. The talk of poisoning appeared to have terrified them. And no one spoke of the dreadful smell. . . .

They seemed suspicious of each other, and again through the cloud of dizziness it occurred to Anne that they all hated each other with a consuming hatred. The Duke's daughter was watching the pale Charleston dancer. The Marquis de Gotha was staring coldly, with eyes like tiny marbles, at the Princesse de Vignes. The Grand Duke had taken a little phial from his pocket and was pouring green drops into his glass of water.

Suddenly Madame de Vignes, looking at him, laughed. "Zizi is saving us the trouble. He is removing himself." She reached across with a long spidery arm covered to the elbow with false diamonds and touched his hands. "You needn't, Zizi dear. You're not a bore . . . at least, not yet."

He drew away from her and said fiercely, "They're drops I take for my heart. I don't think the conversation is funny. It's banal and stupid."

[And

And then sharply the smell rose again in a suffocating wave, forcing them all into silence.

Fannie knew that the party had collapsed. Desperately she rose and went to the piano at the end of the room. It was a signal for Harris. She began to bang wildly and loudly, "*Yes, sir, that's my baby,*" and the Charleston dancer, his eyes bright with the light of cocaine, sprang up and began to dance insanely. The weary lids of the Grand Duke raised a little and the green eyes watched the contortions for a moment and then turned away, bored. The wild nigger music filled the ancient house from the top floor occupied by the sinister Monsieur Kalendian to the cellar where the Apothecary had once lived.

The dance ended, suddenly and awkwardly, in a thick silence. Madame de Vignes made a pretense at applause. Then the smell filled the room again and Anne Masterson with her eyes closed heard a woman's voice cry out, "I've been robbed. . . ."

Opening her eyes she saw Mrs. Brodman standing in the middle of the room beneath the chandelier. Her face was white and contorted. It had shriveled in anger into a white cabbage. It was

no longer Mrs. Brodman, hostess to the Flower of Europe, but Rebecca Weiberger, daughter of a Soho pawnbroker, who had been robbed by the *goys*. Those people in the room were her ancient enemies, who patronized and lived off her—the Princesse de Vignes who owed her a small fortune, the Grand Duke who had once persecuted her own race, Lady Connie who had stolen her lover.

The smell rose again in a sickening wave and the twenty years' hardness of Madame de Vignes cracked and fell apart. She began to weep hysterically.

Fannie sprang forward to save the day. "It's only been lost, Mrs. Brodman."

Mrs. Brodman looked at her. "I'm not a fool," she said.

"But surely no one in this room would steal!"

Fannie appeared to have gone to pieces. She stood now all red and coarsened under the harsh light. And she had said the one thing she never should have said. In the silence the words seemed to hang in the air, taking on the horrid green color of irony. They seemed to mean exactly the opposite of what she had said.

There was a deep sigh from the Grand Duke.

The Marquis de Gotha tried to smile and only succeeded in showing a row of unpleasant pointed yellow teeth. The bracelets on his wrist tinkled faintly. The Duke of Sebastiola had turned quite grey, and Mr. Harris was twitching. Madame de Vignes continued to weep wildly.

And then abruptly, with a melodramatic gesture, the Duke's daughter rose and, flinging her worn sable scarf about her thin shoulders, she said in her death-bed voice, "I'm leaving this filthy party. If anyone tries to stop me, I'll speak out. I know who stole the emerald."

For a moment it seemed that Fannie meant to attack her. "You're being nasty, Connie . . . because you're jealous of a man who won't sleep with you any longer. You're a dirty, jealous slut! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

For a second the air crackled with the hatred, so long confined, between the two women. Into the green eyes of Lady Connie there came a cold glitter. They were suddenly like the eyes of a snake, without pity. "What use is shame to me? Or to you, Fannie, or to any of us, for that matter? Why speak of shame in a room filled with people like us?" She moved toward the door,

and then, as if she had forgotten something, she turned sharply and said, "Your day is finished, Fannie. You might as well throw up the sponge and go to the workhouse. If you ever can get people to come to another dinner, make certain the drains are in order. The smell is horrible." As she closed the door, she said, "You can all go to hell, as far as I'm concerned."

For Anne the scene held a horrid and incredible fascination. She saw that Fannie had turned deathly white and looked ill. She knew that she was quite white because the spots of rouge showed up suddenly in hard red splotches. Fannie was saying to Mrs. Brodman, "I'll make myself responsible."

The pawnbroker's daughter laughed. "*You* make yourself responsible! *You*! Can *you* pay for an emerald that cost nine thousand pounds? No, I shall call in the police."

"The police! In *my* house!"

"You wouldn't like that, would you?"

"With a dinner of such people. . . . " Her voice was suddenly weak. " . . . of such people," she echoed, and the words seemed to mean some-

thing quite different. The old consoling phrase came to her lips. "The Flower of Europe!"

For a moment Mrs. Brodman was silent, as if waiting again for the awful smell to corrode that phrase "The Flower of Europe." Then she said, "Such distinguished people mightn't like the police either . . . such people who put up with me for what they can get from me, and sneer at me when they've left my table. I want my emerald . . . nothing else."

And then she heard the sobs of Anne, half-stifled by her handkerchief. "Let her go," said Mrs. Brodman. "She ought never to have come here. If anyone else tries to leave the room I'll have the police on him." No one stirred. "None of you wants to see the police. None of you wants a scandal in the papers. It would be a fine one for the pink 'uns."

Fannie, gathering her bedraggled dignity about her, crossed the room and putting an affectionate arm about Anne led her toward the door. The Duke of Sebastiola rose to follow them, but Mrs. Brodman blocked his way.

"You heard what I said, Toto."

"But she can't go home alone."

"She's safer alone than with you."

He turned away meekly. The Marquis de Gotha, jingling his bracelets, began to mutter about people of low birth, but Mrs. Brodman was concerned only with Fannie.

"You're not to cross the doorstep, Fannie . . . not to put a foot over it."

Fannie turned, obedient as a little child, but she managed to whisper to Anne in a final flare-up of invincible optimism, "I wouldn't speak of this to Miss Van Siden or anyone. There's been a mistake. Everything will be all right tomorrow."

Again the smell rose and corroded the words with irony. . . .

11

At the end of the hall there was only a dim gaslight, one of the landlord's concessions to picturesqueness and false antiquity. By its smoky glow Anne, sobbing, and confused because she could not say what it was that so terrified her, felt her way along the damp mildewed walls, down the uneasy curve of the stairs. A truck passed the old house and caused it to creak and tremble. As she descended the stairs she was aware that the

disgusting smell grew stronger and stronger. She felt that she was suffocating and, nauseated, put her handkerchief over her nose and mouth. Before her there was a thin rim of light showing from the street beneath the door. She had almost reached it when in the darkness her foot struck something which gave off a faint metallic ring. Then she slipped and fell forward on her knees into a jagged tangle of thin metal which set up a terrifying clatter. A door opened at her side and the hall was bathed in dim yellow light. She saw that she had fallen into a funeral wreath of violets and roses made of painted metal. The odor was suddenly overwhelming.

Above her a voice was saying, "Tiens, Mademoiselle. You haven't hurt yourself?" It was a policeman standing in the door of the Apothecary's shop. He had come, she knew, to arrest them all.

He helped her to her feet and brushed the dust from her cloak, and then behind him she had a glimpse of the Apothecary's shop. On a wooden table, with candles at the head and feet, lay the swollen naked body of a man with a grey face and a tangled black beard. An old woman, all in

black, was washing the body, and beyond her against the rows of colored bottles sat two other old women, who appeared to be waiting. To Anne there came suddenly the strange idea that they had been there always, waiting.

The policeman was saying, "It is the Apothecary, Mademoiselle. He died four days ago. They only found him tonight."

She knew what the smell was that corroded Fannie's party. It was the odor of death.

12

A little before dawn the Flower of Europe left Fannie's flat. The Duke of Sebastiola had returned Rebecca Brodman's emerald and so there had been no scandal. But Fannie's joke about the Apothecary was at an end. In his dirty little shop the candles burned until the grey light of dawn stealing through the shutters revealed him lying in the midst of his strange things, watched over by the three old women who had appeared out of nowhere. And above-stairs Fannie, looking at herself in the mirror, knew now that the Apothecary had never gone away at all. He had been waiting there all the while.

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